

JUDAISM

FESTSCHRIFT

In Honor of Dr. Robert Gordis

**Eugene B. Borowitz — Jeffrey M. Cohen — Shaye J.D. Cohen —
Elliot N. Dorff — Samuel H. Dresner — Louis Finkelstein —
Judah Goldin — Daniel H. Gordis — David M. Gordis —
Simon Greenberg — Reuven Hammer — Steven
Huberman — Schneir Levin — Franklin
H. Littell — Michael L. Morgan —
W. Gunther Plaut — Ira Robinson —
Gilbert S. Rosenthal — Benjamin
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Zimmermann**

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A QUARTERLY JOURNAL

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless — the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

For Dr. Robert Gordis' Festschrift

IT IS AN HONOR TO BE SIGNIFICANTLY identified with this special issue of JUDAISM and it was a pleasure to be associated with Ruth B. Waxman and Lippman Bodoff in its production.

For more than half a century Dr. Gordis has been among the most widely-known, highly-regarded, and influential spiritual and intellectual leaders of American and, indeed, of World Jewry. Though he is among the most prominent leaders and articulate proponents of the Conservative Movement, his wide erudition and variegated communal activities bespoke a mind and a heart to which nothing Jewish or human was alien.

As congregational Rabbi, academician, author, editor, and orator, he has beneficently touched the lives of numberless men and women who have come within the radius of his written or spoken word. The high regard that so many have for him and the extraordinary scope and variety of his intellectual interests we hope are in some measure reflected in this issue of JUDAISM, the magazine which he helped found and which he edited until recently for some two decades. We are grateful to Dr. Gordis' students and colleagues whose scholarly contributions appear in this issue.

We present this edition of "his" magazine to Robert Gordis with the prayer that this evidence of our affection and admiration may serve as a ray of light and joy to ease the burden which he now so heroically bears.

ברגשי כבוד ובהערצה

Simon Greenberg
Special Editor

Editorial Acknowledgement

Since this issue of JUDAISM is a special one, being a *Festschrift* in honor of its Editor Emeritus, Dr. Robert Gordis, we felt it appropriate to have a Special Editor to share our responsibilities and our pleasure in preparing it. Accordingly, we invited Dr. Simon Greenberg, a renowned scholar and life-long friend and colleague of Dr. Gordis, to work with us. He accepted with grace and enthusiasm and we thank him profoundly for the efforts and the insights which he brought to this volume. We also wish to thank Mr. William Donat, of Waldon Press, for his generosity in helping make this *Festschrift* a reality.

R.B.W.

Rethinking Our Holocaust Consciousness

EUGENE B. BOROWITZ

OUR JEWISH TURN FROM MESSIANIC MODERNISM has pivoted on the Holocaust and our response to it. I seek to probe its spiritual footings afresh by analyzing the many anomalies of our religious discussion of the Holocaust.

To begin with, why did it take us until the mid-1960s to initiate widespread discussion of its “meaning”? Why did almost all of our thinkers then reject what Richard Rubenstein claimed was its critical theological challenge? Why did our years of theological discussion yield no ideas not well known before Hitler? Why did our largely agnostic community keep talking about the nature of a God it did not affirm? Why didn’t liberated humanism, associated with the death-of-God, conquer the Jewish community, which, instead, became more interested in Jewish spirituality and mysticism? Why did Orthodoxy, allegedly invalidated by the Holocaust, become newly attractive to modernized Jews and yet remain a minority? Why did the State of Israel, our great answer to the Holocaust, lose its salvific significance? Why have the non-Orthodox Judaisms, all tarred by modernity’s failures, retained the spiritual allegiance of most modernized Jews? And how does the religious experience underlying these developments set our Jewish theological agenda?

I begin with the historical background: emancipation, modernization, and secularization. Already in the late 19th century, believing Jewish thinkers created non-Orthodox — that is, liberal — theologies of Judaism while more skeptical types broke with religion and created secular theories of Judaism. This broad scale demythologization of the Jewish religion was the accepted ethos of modernized Jews everywhere well before Hitler. This meant that those modern Jews who still spoke about God did so in the terms created by the Jewish rationalists, utilizing Cohenian terms like “God-idea” or “concept of God,” which reduced God to the founding premise of rational ethics, or, in the Kaplanian version, to those natural forces that further the development of our human potential.

After World War II, the new democratization of American society intensified our community’s uncomfortable inner tension. Our growing acceptance depended on our being one of America’s “three great religions,” and our suburbanization largely limited our self-identification

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as Jews to the synagogue. Only this conflicted with the reality that most modern Jews were agnostics — the pre-War atheistic certainties having faded — who tolerated worship with difficulty and contented themselves with supporting the synagogue for its familial and communal uses.

Socially and theologically, Jews could not easily discuss the theological implications of the Holocaust even had they been so inclined. To raise a cry against the God who tolerated such an enormity would expose the full extent of Jewish unbelief to Christian America, thereby undermining Judaism's status as one of America's equivalent faiths. This changed only in the mid-1960s, when the Protestant death-of-God movement captured the popular imagination and created a new cultural circumstance. The spiritual convulsion that rolled through much of American Christianity can most easily be explained as a consequence of its long overdue secularization. Consider two of its pivotal books: Paul Van Buren's *The Secular Meaning of the Gospels*, which argued that the Christ needed to be understood in fully human terms, and Harvey Cox's *The Secular City*, which argued for the churches becoming more worldly and political. With Jesus de-trinitized, and social responsibility via politics the major focus of Christian living, God had become superfluous, a philosophical and cultural embarrassment. But if America could tolerate such a humanistic Christianity, it might equally do so for a long-secularized Judaism.

When Jews began to join this discussion, they did so in a distinctively Jewish way (the common pattern of such general-Jewish cultural encounters). It had not occurred to any of the seminal Christian death-of-God thinkers — Paul Van Buren, William Hamilton, Gabriel Vahanian or Thomas J.J. Altizer — to discuss the Holocaust. Their arguments grew from developments in philosophy, culture or personal religious experience, not from what recent history might imply about the absence of God. Their abstractness clashed sharply with the traditional Jewish concern about God's involvement with people in history, which now suddenly became an argument against God. That critical difference noted, American Jewry quickly joined in the death of God discussions as an acceptable American context in which they might finally express their old/new religious doubts.

Richard Rubenstein's Death of God Challenge

The form that our ensuing theological debates took shows them to be a continuation of our ongoing arguments about how best to modernize Judaism. Richard Rubenstein's collection of articles, entitled *After Auschwitz*, defined much of the discussion. He contended that the Holocaust had made it impossible for a responsible person any longer to believe in the God of the Covenant, the One, he said, whom Judaism considered as "the ultimate, omnipotent actor in history." The sages

of Biblical-rabbinic Judaism had intimately identified the Covenant with God's justice. When Jews do the good, God blesses them abundantly; when they sin, God punishes them, a theme so significant that the second paragraph of the full *Shema* consists of a passage expounding it (Deut. 11:13-21). This led to the further Biblical teaching that God employs the enemies of the Jews to punish them, hoping — through their suffering — to return them to faithfulness. From the prophets until recent times, at least until the Chmielnicki pogroms (1648), Jewish calamity evoked from Jewish thinkers the Covenantal judgment: Because of our sins God has properly brought this evil upon us.

If so, Rubenstein, pointed out, we should, in all piety, say that God used Hitler to punish and reform us, a view that would give Him some vindication, a doctrine that Rubenstein considered utterly obscene. It seemed far more blasphemous than inferring from the terrifying reality of the Holocaust that an empty neutrality pervaded the universe and that, at least in our time, God, the God of the Covenant, was dead.

The critique stung and aroused much response. But to whom was it directed? Rubenstein wrote for modernized, non-Orthodox Jews, yet demanded that they give up their retributive God, the One who tightly scrutinized actions and responded to them with immediately palpable justice. Yet, such a God had long had no place in the worldview of Jews who fled the ghetto. For them, science, not theology, explained what happened in nature, and political commentators, not the prophets, did the same for history. As the 19th century moved on, Jewish thinkers like Hermann Cohen and their rabbinic popularizers reworked the Jewish view of God to emphasize human agency — ethics — and so saw secular causation adequately explaining specific events.

Rejecting God's Management of History

We can gauge what had already happened to the Jewish view of history from our people's response to the 1903 pogrom in Kishinev. To the world's outrage, the Russian police stood by idly, and perhaps encouragingly, as 47 Jews were killed and 92 others were severely wounded by mobs. The reaction of Jews to this tragedy — most particularly of those who lived in Russia — reveals how fully God's retribution had given way to a secularistic commitment to human responsibility. Perhaps some few pietists could still suggest that the Russian mobs and their governmental protectors had been God's agents; had any modern Jews suggested the notion, they would have been thought ridiculous. And one would have to search hard to find a lament that Jewish sin had brought this evil upon the community. Instead, Russian Zionists called for Jewish self-defense units, and Hebrew writers derided the passivity of Jews in simply accepting the slaughter. World Jewry, too, responded by organizing itself for political action, emergency aid

and rescue, not for fasting and prayer. No modern Jewish writer distressfully inquired where God was during the pogrom; moderns knew that human freedom, not God's retributive pedagogy, lay behind these events.

Every major modern Jewish philosopher of the 20th century reinforced this more reticent view of God's role in history; surely rationalism permitted little else. In its finest European variety — the neo-Kantianism of Hermann Cohen — God grounds and spurs ethics, but a free humanity determines what will happen in history for good or for ill. In its favorite American form — Mordecai Kaplan's naturalism — God was carefully redefined to have only limited power. Kaplan considered the notion of God intervening in human affairs to be the kind of carry-over supernaturalism that made moderns reject Jewish belief. Even in Leo Baeck's reach beyond reason to religious consciousness, God remains the mystery that we sense behind our ethics, not an independent agent dominating history.

The existentialism of Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber did not yield a stronger view of retribution. The former denies that the Jewish people truly lives in history, while the latter relegates academic, that is, secularistic history, to the realm of I-it relationships, where God, the Eternal Thou, cannot be encountered. In some ways, Abraham Heschel's thought most tellingly instances this distancing of God from events, because he — alone of our master philosophers — wrote his major works after the Holocaust. Though an exalted God dominates his theology, all but a few sentences of his rare comments about the Holocaust refer to human failure and not to God's ineffable wisdom and inscrutable justice.

For many years before the Holocaust, most rabbis — when they actually referred to God — used the humanized concepts of these master teachers, not a tight reading of Isaiah that might yield the idea that our God is Rubenstein's "ultimate, omnipotent actor in history." The God who died for Richard Rubenstein, as a result of the Holocaust, had long since been re-interpreted in other fashions by modern Jews. Consequently, when Jewish thinkers began addressing the religious issues posed by the Holocaust, they did not consider themselves obligated to defend a strong, Deuteronomic view of God's justice. Instead, they explored the implications of this awesome evildoing in the context of their modern understandings of God and human nature.

Denying the Qualitative Uniqueness of the Holocaust

Another assertion, central to the debate over the Holocaust, has also been widely rejected, in this case after acknowledging its pertinence. Emil Fackenheim deems the Holocaust a qualitatively unique instance of evil, and stipulates that its uniqueness not be trivialized by reducing

it to the singleness of every other event in history. Rather, the Nazi effort to kill all Jews merely because of their Jewishness exposed humankind to an utterly new dimension of evil. As a result, no previous philosophic or Jewish religious response to the problem of evil can be remotely adequate to a discussion of the Holocaust. For Elie Wiesel, however, the stupefying uniqueness of the Holocaust extends to negating any possibility of our even formulating apt questions about it, and, therefore, certainly precludes the possibility of our finding answers. Fackenheim and others, conscious that philosophizing might be a blasphemous mitigation of the horror, nonetheless believe that we must attempt to elucidate its implications for contemporary Jewish belief.

Fackenheim argues that the Nazis' unparalleled depravity arose more from their intention than from their acts. They carried out this evil fully conscious of its depravity; worse, they did it for the sheer willfulness of doing so monstrous an evil. He supports this view by citing numerous examples of the Nazis self-destructively pursuing their demonic goal, as in diverting railroad equipment that was desperately needed to repel the Allied invasion so that they could continue transporting Jews to the death camps. Fackenheim's interpretation of Nazi intentions is ultimately unconvincing because it finds so little direct support in the vast historic evidence about the Holocaust. To the contrary, the more we study the records of the Third Reich, the more we see how concretely goal-directed and, therefore, routinized was the progression from discrimination to degradation and then to murder. Far from consciously seeking to do evil for evil's sake, they applied their fabled ethnic discipline to achieving what their demented logic had identified as a supreme "ethical" good: ridding Europe and the world of a racial strain that would otherwise destroy true human value. Most Jewish thinkers consider the Holocaust a most egregious human evil — if one may use comparative terminology when referring to events of awesome inhumanity — but one that needs to be considered on the continuum of other human evils, not in a realm of its own.

In somewhat the same spirit, there has been a general rejection of the corollary claim by Wiesel, Rubenstein, Fackenheim, and others that the Holocaust must now become a second Sinai, the determining reality of contemporary Jewish existence. If by this they only meant that Jews should reject any interpretation of Judaism that has not been centrally shaped by the Holocaust, few would disagree. But since they have proposed that we should now view all of existence, human and Jewish, in terms of the Holocaust, their position has been rejected as disproportionate. Genocidal destruction has not been the common theme of the many terrifying ills of 20th century history, which mostly have arisen from a doleful continuation of the human failings so often seen in history: inaction, ignorance, mindlessness, venality, perversity,

and mendaciousness. Little seems new except the scale of our malefaction, the education and efficiency that we bring to it, and the immediacy with which the world gets to know about it. Moreover, a Holocaust-centered view of life might easily obscure how much goodness people do, day by day. Our people is a case in point for, despite our troubles, we do not spend our days desperately fending off extinction. While the Holocaust must fundamentally figure in our view of Jewish identity, it does not faithfully teach us the reality of Jewish existence day by day.

Our Good God, Limited or Inscrutable?

When the thinkers turned directly to the issue of theodicy, they mostly followed two lines of interpretation that partly helped the community meet this issue in an unforeseen manner.

Jews who must understand with some clarity before they can believe, and want good reasons for doing so, argued that, rather than being omnipotent, God has but limited power. God may be as powerful as anything can be and supremely good; God does all the good that God can do. Occasionally, that will not be sufficient to counteract an eruption of the evil latent in nature or caused by human freedom. This very human freedom to do good or evil and, thus, to affirm or defy our most intimate knowledge of God's will, decisively proves God's finitude and rationally explains why evil, slight or gruesome, can occur.

This theodicy was not the esoteric possession of a Jewish elite, but had been widely disseminated among American Jews by the many disciples of a number of influential teachers. Thus, Mordecai Kaplan, echoing the thought of American religious liberals like William James, taught to his students at the Jewish Theological Seminary such a finite God concept already in the 1930s and then wrote a book elucidating it. Henry Slonimsky, the inspiration and spiritual guide of two generations of rabbis trained at Stephen Wise's Jewish Institute of Religion, taught a similar doctrine in the same period. Utilizing European philosophical trends, he intriguingly suggested that the limited God "grows" as does everything else alive — in God's case, through human partnership in completing creation.

The more philosophical rationalists and their followers took an oblique approach to limiting God, developing their theodicy in terms of reason's power rather than by speculation on God's nature. They generally followed Hermann Cohen's neo-Kantianism, which maintained that a properly rational mind cannot logically deal with questions about ultimate reality, i.e., metaphysics — in this case, whether God's power is finite or infinite. Thoughtful people should, therefore, base their religious belief on what the mature mind can know with certainty, namely, one's ethical obligations. So, the mainstream of American non-

Orthodoxy communicated a "God-idea" whose religious function essentially was to ground its ethics. But its "concept of God" had nothing to do with "explaining" the reality of evil, a metaphysical problem that transcends the powers of reason. Instead of worrying about meaningless (because unanswerable) questions, a rational person would "answer" evil by ethics, that is, by preventive or remedial action. This pragmatic, anti-speculative response to evil has so spoken to the American Jewish soul that it has become a major aspect of every variety of theodicy among us.

Finite God theories are appealing because they clarify how one can intelligently believe in a good God without denying the reality of evil. They also have won wide acceptance because they motivate moral responsibility by their conclusion that human ethics must complete what God's limited power leaves undone. But they also generate a sufficient number of new religious problems, logical and spiritual, so that many Jews have rejected them.

These more traditional believers reaffirm the view commonly considered characteristic of rabbinic Judaism: Though we know much about God, we also know that God far transcends what we can know about God. We do not know why the good God permits the evils of this world, but we trust God, anyway. We do so out of gratitude and awe. Each day, rising up and lying down, if we can say the hundred blessings required of a Jew, we are reminded of God's continual gifts. Our observance teaches a piety of the ordinary, a hallowing of the many gifts that we might otherwise arrogantly consider ours by right. This daily thanksgiving sets the context for facing the evils beyond our control or understanding; it enables many people to accept the unexplainable. Few of us are Job, and most of us would acknowledge that God gives us very much more than we deserve or could claim. Of course, the Jobian exceptions are real and they deeply disrupt everyone's relationship with God. In the hideous evil of the Holocaust, the exceptional threatened to become the norm. No wonder that many people spoke of the death-of-God, and no wonder that limited-God theologies gained great currency. Yet, large numbers of Jews also took the classic path of Jewish faith: they affirmed God even though they did not understand God. They may have done so with trembling, but, as in their experience of human love, they knew that some mysteries require us to give the heart priority over the mind.

Both of these post-Holocaust positions regarding God and evil had been widely known in the Jewish community before Hitler. Astonishingly, for all that the death-of-God debates had centered on theodicy, they had produced no new theory or doctrine of God but only some linguistic variations of the old ones. Let me compensate for this sweeping generalization by immediately indicating how our sense of God's unfathomable absence during the Holocaust did intensify our two-pre-

Holocaust theodicies. Before Hitler, few thinkers had imagined that God was so limited or so utterly inscrutable. No one had ever considered before that God could be so withdrawn. And this awesome sense of God's potential unavailability gave a terrifying new reality to the best defense that can be offered for God's tolerance of evil: that goodness is so central to God that God never violates humankind's freedom to do good or evil — not even in the face of enormities as great as those of the Nazis.

The Determinative Latent Content of the Holocaust Debates

Yet, even after noting this radicalization of theological tone, the enigma persists. If our community had not seriously believed in the God whose demise had been announced, if our years of intellectual debate left us with largely the same understandings of God and evil that had been known before the Holocaust, why did these religious debates so trouble our spirits?

For one thing, some Jews had never become as modern in their thought as in their life style, and their beliefs never progressed beyond the literalistic notions acquired as children. For another, the trauma of the Nazi barbarity made some Jews regress to their childhood notions of God as the all-nurturing Mama-Papa. All such images of God would be under severe stress as a result of the Holocaust debates. But these suppositions hardly explain why the spiritual dislocation that we experienced in those days was so widely and deeply felt. We must seek our understanding elsewhere, and we will find it by following up an observation of Elie Wiesel that the death camps, rather than shattering the faith of the traditionalists, most fully undid the worldview of the intellectuals and liberals.

This explanation, I am convinced, derives as much from our general cultural situation as it does from our frightful particular experience. With the inner life of modern Jews dominated more by Western civilization than by a distinctive Judaism, the general retreat from messianic modernism could not but deeply affect Jews. To explain how this manifested itself in our community, let me proceed by means of a theory of the mid-nineteenth century German theologian, Ludwig Feuerbach. Seeking to re-establish religion's relevance to sophisticates who were giddy over the advances in human thought and technology, he suggested that, at its core, religion grows from human aspiration, not God's revelation. In creating our various concepts of God, we are, he argued, really specifying our highest, most ideal human values. Under cover of our God-talk, we are celebrating the human potential, projecting the self that we desire to be to a transcendent level and, by calling it "God," investing it with commanding power (a theological notion that Freud later adopted and to which he gave rich psychological content).

While I do not accept Feuerbach's insight as anything like the whole truth about our views of God, I believe that what he taught us about projection powerfully explains a major part of our response to the Holocaust. If God-talk mostly discloses our human ideals, then our post-Holocaust theological distress was a classic instance of Freudian displacement, of substituting a less emotional topic for a highly disturbing one. Not having believed much in God, we modern Jews could not be deeply troubled by God's death. But if God-talk projects beliefs about humanity, "the death of God" shielded us from the tragic loss of the one "god" in whom we moderns had avidly trusted — ourselves, humankind. We had expected no other to save us from all our human ills. Our operative faith was "the perfectibility of man (*sic*)" which culminated, through our ethical action, in "the Messianic Age." In high statistical disproportion, Jews served as the prophets of this humanism and taught the secular salvation of politics, intellect, and high culture.

Then we saw Germany Nazified and our people become Nazi Germany's special victims. This "transvaluation of all values" turned out to be more seismic than any imagined by Nietzsche, who, late in the 19th century, proclaimed the death of religion's God and became the darling of optimistic Jewish secularizers. The Holocaust refuted everything that we had identified with modernity — so much so that, before the evidence became incontrovertible, it was not possible. Trusting human progress as we did, we could give as little credence to the early reports of the mass murder as the hindsight which historians now have for our blindness then.

A corollary psychic denial of Western culture's spiritual bankruptcy operated for years after World War II, as American Jews basked in unprecedented social acceptance and economic success. Only America's own self-doubt, brought on by racial conflict and the Viet Nam War, made it possible for Jews, like others, to begin to face the clash between their experience and their functional optimism. Even then, our psyches could not stand so direct an attack on the faith on which we had staked our lives. Instead of facing up to the loss of our messianic self-image, we found it easier to agonize about the death of the traditional God whom we had not really believed in.

The Self-contraction of Humankind Makes a Place for God

Not the least irony in this ongoing development has been its eventual reversal, of course. The Jewish death-of-God movement heralded itself as the triumph of modernity. By ending our dependency on a revealing, saving God, it liberated us for maturely independent responsibility. The result, however, has not been the proliferation of socially concerned ethical activists, but a radical loss of sure values that has sapped the moral energy of our society and, thereby, discredited

modernity. Even more unanticipated was the unwitting role of the death-of-God debates in bringing our community, or a critical portion of it, back to God. The Holocaust discussions began with many people denying God's existence out of simple moral indignation. Some believed that human rationality mandated ethics, while others claimed that human nature was intrinsically good — so that, once we made society less malignant, human evil would disappear. Why, then, should rational people mourn the passing of the God of synagogue and church?

But where else shall we gain such secular moral certainty after the Holocaust? Surely not from the old assumptions about human rationality and goodness. German culture and intellectuality abetted more than it challenged the Nazi madness, and the democratic, liberal ethos of the Allies did not motivate them to disrupt the Nazi murder. With this dismal record before us, with our continuing exposure to the evil done everywhere by people in places high and low, only a minority of Jews can still unhesitatingly assert that human beings are primarily rational or inherently good. Contemporary philosophy does nothing to refute these practical conclusions. Academics once made what appeared to be a convincing case for considering ethics an essential component of human reason; today's thinkers regularly restrict rationality to logical reasoning, relegating the motive and content of ethics to less compelling aspects of our being or social life. Thus, the commanding sense of rational moral law, which we once took so for granted that is justified our denying God's value and reality, has been repudiated by history, experience, and intellect. We Jews have not been exceptions to Western civilization's disillusion with modernity. If anything, our experience has been a major factor in bringing it to its postmodern turn.

For decent human beings, the loss of a sure ground of human values must be traumatic. For Jews, it is utterly intolerable, for it blurs the qualitative difference between the Nazis and their victims. *Regardless of what the world knows or cares, anything that mitigates the categorical distinction between the S.S. death camp operators and their Jewish victims violates our most fundamental contemporary experience and contravenes a central mandate of our tradition!* One need not be a philosopher or intellectual to know this truth: one needs only still to be human. Against all our modern expectations, the Holocaust showed us evil, real and unrelieved, and taught us that, against all our yearning to be tolerant and pluralistic, utter evil must be opposed absolutely. And that mandate makes sense only if we can still honestly affirm the reality of unqualified good.

The experience of primal evil, confronting us with its thoroughgoing negativity, has forced us to affirm an equally elemental good. But pure secularity no longer knows so categorical, so definitive a good, and our moral indignation, therefore, forces us to move in an opposite direction. If we insist that our intuition of a commanding goodness is not an illusion, then, as thinking people, we must search for its

ground — and this has led the Jewish community, as so much else of Western civilization, to a post-secular spiritual search. Though we may have only a dim, troubled, barely verbalizable acknowledgement of an unshakeable demand for value at the heart of the universe — one that we must, to remain human, answer and exemplify — then we have found our personal way to what our tradition in various ways called “God.” It is this postmodern recovery of spirituality that lies behind our community’s general rejection of the death-of-God movement, and a significant minority’s involvement in Orthodoxy, *havurot*, mysticism, and other forms of religious search.

This experience of the absoluteness of the good has been critical to the spiritual change that has come over Western civilization and has, even more profoundly, affected the Jews. For the grisly evil of the Holocaust epitomizes all the vileness that, out of revulsion, has been the dominant motive bringing individuals and groups to search for a post-modern, realistic spirituality.

The Corollary Ethnic Turn of the Postmodern Sensibility

There is an important concomitant to postmodern spirituality: ethnic rootedness. Emil Fackenheim identified this post-Holocaust reality famously in postulating what he termed our 614th commandment: “The authentic Jew of today is not permitted to hand Hitler yet another, posthumous victory.” A commanding if unidentifiable Voice from Auschwitz demanded that Jews do what they could to promote the survival and welfare of the people of Israel, and much of the positive tone of Jewish life in recent decades has been due to their acceptance of this responsibility. I will focus on two major aspects of this resurgence of ethnicity, artificially separating them from one another: the more obvious renewal centered on the State of Israel; its companion development involved Diaspora Jewry in a more explicitly ethnicized — that is, particularistically Jewish — manner of observance and belief.

The State of Israel became a central concern of most of world Jewry only as a result of the Six Day War of 1967. Before then, only our minority of ideological Zionists found the reality of their Jewish lives substantially altered by the establishment of the State of Israel or its early accomplishments. Few Jews emigrated there who did not have to; few learned Hebrew or involved themselves in political action on its behalf. Only in rhetoric did it serve as world Jewry’s “spiritual center.”

The circumstances of the Six Day War and its consequences radically raised our Jewish consciousness toward the State of Israel. The prior public discussion of the Holocaust had made us apprehensive that God would again be absent, and television pictures of demonstrators in various Arab capitals calling for the destruction of the State of Israel made the threat personal. The great Christian churches were silent,

the leaders of the democracies non-committal. The three day news blackout after the war began was a time of hideous imagination, of deep soul-searching, of religious hope and consternation, and an overwhelming, voluntary outpouring of help, most notably by Jews who had never previously included themselves in the Jewish community. Then news came of the staggering Israeli victory. World Jewry experienced an elation that transcended relief from dread or rejoicing at Israeli prowess; the Bible calls it deliverance. Jews everywhere found themselves uncomprehendingly overwhelmed by the sight of soldiers converging on the Temple Mount's Western Wall; atheists, agnostics, and believers alike found themselves moved to prayer. I believed then and now that we had personally experienced God's saving power, something which I can explain as little as I can explain God's absence during the Holocaust — but an experience that I remain certain was not illusion, one real enough that it moved a critical mass of our people to rededicate themselves to Jewish existence.

Subsequently, the effect of this revelatory moment diminished, but it still powerfully shaped the ensuing ethnic-political struggle, particularly when the 1973 war with Egypt showed how vulnerable the State of Israel remained. Now proudly particularistic, Diaspora Jews demanded that their leaders unabashedly lobby their governments on behalf of the State of Israel, so that this generation would never be accused of repeating the sins of the Holocaust.

World Jewry also had positive grounds for its new sense of identification of Jews with the State of Israel. Again and again, Jews who visited there returned deeply affected by what they saw Jews achieving as a Jewish society. In what Koestler called "our political ice-age," the State of Israel appeared a model of moral politics; it also became the shining symbol of our people's trans-political, instinctive, life-affirming answer to Hitler's nihilism, giving Israel a numinosity, a sacred aura that even a secularized generation could not ignore. Theologically put, it made evident what the Holocaust had made us doubt: that the Covenant between God and the people of Israel continues in full force. With this resurgence of particularity, the old primacy of Jewry's self-deprecating universalism gave way to the postmodern query, "Is this good for the Jews?"

Does God Still Have a Role in Jewish Particularity?

I believe that the roots of our intensified Jewishness go far deeper than national solidarity or group pride. In these years of danger and self-esteem, many of us partisans of human equality, who had eschewed making special claims for the Jewish people, found that we also believed that an absoluteness attached to Jewish survival and flourishing. We had finally become conscious that, for us, the demise of the Jewish

people would mean not merely a social trauma or broken emotional ties, but an irreparable human loss. Whether in response to danger or as a result of love for this folk or both, many of us discovered that we believe that the Jewish people are indispensable, not merely to ourselves but to the universe and its scheme of things. We now knew that there was something transcendent about Jewish continuity. I will dare the overstatement: We believe that God "needs" Jews — or, if you prefer, that God "wants" Jews to be Jews and not simply Noahides with a Hebraic ethnic coloration.

The unconventional Orthodox writer and community leader, Irving ("Yitz") Greenberg, has reached the opposite conclusion. His vision of post-Holocaust Jewishness rejects any more-than-human mandate for Jewish survival. He contends that the Holocaust teaches us not that God-is-dead but that God no longer has any right to command Israel, i.e., the Holocaust proclaims the death-of-*mizvah*. Only the Jewish will to continue Jewish existence now keeps the Covenant and Jewish obligation alive.

I hear in this radicalism the anguished outcry of a traditional Jew who, for love of Jews and of all human beings, cannot bear what the God of classic Jewish practice allowed to happen in the Holocaust. But denying any transcendent significance to Jewish duty raises the issue of how much importance we should attach to it, and, more critically, what sacrifices we should make for it. Of course, as long as we find Jewish experience rewarding and have a Jewish memory rich with emotion and knowledge, Jewish life will continue. And as long as Western culture remains spiritually barren, the varied resources of Jewish culture will commend themselves. However, if Jewish living is only a matter of choice, why should we take on its special burdens in the State of Israel or the Diaspora when we can do as much, or more, for ourselves and others through less troublesome social forms?

Greenberg apparently believes that we can count on the endurance of postmodern Jewish ethnicity, and he seeks to insure this by educating for Jewish literacy and values. Where he and others believe that we can separate the ethnic from the spiritual drives in the postmodern ethos, I believe that this exclusively humanistic view of ethnicity returns us to the faulty premise of Jewish modernity, the humanization of Jewish obligation. And, as we move toward the 21st century, I see considerable evidence in the State of Israel that an increasing number of Jews, who feel that the extent of their Jewishness is essentially a matter of personal choice, are giving it a considerably lower priority than it once generally had. If, however, one primarily knows that Jewish discipline deserves more concern than this, that it has a certain commanding power to it, then we need a more adequate theory of Jewish duty than this. The conflict between these two interpretations of post-

Holocaust Jewish particularity will have a considerable influence on the vitality of Jewish life in the generation or so ahead.

The Postmodern Integrity of Folk and Faith

To some extent, the Jewish turn to religious particularity began as part of the late-1960s search for one's ethnic roots. Diaspora Jews frequently said that they wanted to be "more Jewish," by which they generally meant more visibly and identifiably part of their folk. Despite their identification with the State of Israel, this led only a few to become dedicated nationalists or Hebraists, a development paralleled in the State of Israel, where Zionism as an ideology motivating personal sacrifice evaporated. Significantly, Zionist idealism remained strong mainly when linked to religious belief, and the initial activities of the Orthodox Gush Emunim movement in the 1980s evoked the admiration of secular Israelis because of its adherents' uncommon willingness to sacrifice for the national good.

In the Diaspora, where Jews faced greater obstacles in asserting their Jewish particularity, the drive to be "more Jewish" mainly resulted in people adopting more traditional forms of Jewish observance. For the first time in modernity, a sizable number of young American Jews insisted on being more visibly Jewish than their parents were. Reform Jews became more Hebraic, Zionist, and ritualistic, while Conservative Jews stressed the halakhic aspects of their movement. Responding to the lack of Jewish seriousness and the impersonality of the established institutions, *havurot* and *minyanim* burgeoned. Some modern Jews became visibly observant, *frum*, and many others adorned their life-styles with identifying practices selected from the neo-traditionalistic *Jewish Catalogs* — all of this being a shock to the comfortably universalized.

The most unanticipated surge took place in Orthodoxy. In the decades after World War II, the most visible segment of the movement combined faithful halakhic observance with such cultural pursuits as the *halakhah* found acceptable, and called itself "Modern Orthodoxy." Ironically, as this modernization reached maturity, fundamentalisms generally became appealing because their God-ordained particularity distanced their adherents from a failing modernity. By the late 1970s, Orthodoxy, once thought of as a doomed relic of the Middle Ages, began attracting many sophisticated Jews who were disenchanted with modernity. As the society's social conservatism grew, separatistic Orthodoxy took on a new self-confidence, and challenged the non-Orthodox about the depth of their Jewishness and the grounds of their universalistic ethics.

In this shift to the right, Modern Orthodoxy found itself accused of being "too modern." Ultra-Orthodoxy, the Jewish equivalent of our civilization's fundamentalist movements, now demanded a Jewish life

that is more absolute in tone and less “goyish” in demeanor. They argued that the Holocaust gave Jews every reason to put as much distance between themselves and the gentile world as was compatible with community security. Not seeing the broader context, most community observers were startled by the number of modernized Jews who were attracted to just those Orthodox communities that appeared to have compromised the least with modernity. Perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of this Jewish rejection of modernity may be seen in those *ba’alei teshuvah* (masters of return — to tradition) who seek out *yeshivot* of such pre-modern piety that their leaders, right-wing adherents of Agudat Yisrael or various Hasidic sects, decry the State of Israel itself as un-Jewish.

A larger and more politically effective group united their ethnicity and religiosity in an activist Orthodox Zionism, esteeming the State of Israel for enabling Jews to live the fullest form of Torah-centered Judaism. Their Diaspora colleagues, unlike most secular Jews, found *aliyah*, “going up” to the Holy Land, a compelling Jewish obligation, while their Israel compeers took action to fulfill God’s injunction to take possession and settle the whole Land of Israel, most notably by settlements in Judea and Samaria. They believe that the laws of the Torah alone define the proper status of Palestinians in the Jewish land; and if this stance or their activism arouses an adverse world response, that is a gentile problem — an assertion of religio-ethnic self-respect that clearly exemplifies one form of the postmodern consciousness.

As We Move to a New Secular Millennium

Social conservatism and spiritual orthodoxies dominated the ethos of the 1980s, everywhere scoring impressive victories over liberalism. In so doing, they also demonstrated the excesses to which they can lead, and thereby caused many moderns, and certainly most Jews, to see the limits of their revisionism. I am not saying that the power of the right has so ebbed that it will have few future political victories, and that the old liberalism will regain dominance. Should anti-modernity regain its messianic fervor and social sway, the Jewish spirituality that I see arising may well die aborning, but I do not expect that to happen. Rather, in a manner more Hegelian than I am usually comfortable with, the modernist thesis having been succeeded by a conservative antithesis, what appears to be emerging is a spiritual synthesis that learns from, yet transcends them both. My Jewish theological program speaks to this new spiritual sensibility.

My analysis of the post-conservative mood begins with noting how much those who fought modernity quietly co-opted many of its concerns. We see this epitomized in the phenomenal burgeoning of right-wing Orthodox publishing, which has made available an extraordinary

range of classic Jewish texts with commentary, halakhic literature, how-to books, and general spiritual inspiration. The characteristics of this literature are telling. For one thing, the authors typically keep the reader's personal interests before them rather than merely communicating their understanding of the tradition, as earlier Orthodox authors did. Moreover, the concerns that they often seek to respond to turn out to be quite modern, like ethics, respect for people, and person-to-person relationships. Most important, these books are in English and are fully Western in their idiom, making this the first generation of rabbinic Jews that has so substantially sought to communicate its message in what our tradition called *la'az*, a "foreign" language.

Orthodox Zionism furnishes another example. The Jews most resolutely opposed to Western culture became anti-Zionist, deeming political Zionism, as did much of European Orthodoxy, a heretical secularization of Judaism that was learned from gentiles. Orthodox Zionism itself results from a certain modernization. One sees this even more clearly in the contrast between the politically passive piety of the old Diaspora religious tradition and the contemporary activism of Gush Emunim and its offshoots. In this Orthodoxy, modern political activism has become a companion to *mizvot*.

Simply put, though many Jews now seek some distance between themselves and the surrounding culture, few of us indeed want to reghettoize. Overwhelmingly, world Jewry has rejected the two outstanding forms of intensified ethnicity and religiosity, living in the State of Israel and becoming Orthodox. Many have done so out of inertia, a self-serving or a bland refusal to take Jewish identity that seriously. Yet, assuming that most Jews are not simply venal, we have a right to ask about the meta-ethic that makes them want to stay Jewish but not in such ethnic and religious transformations. In essence, I believe that, though the State of Israel and Orthodoxy have powerfully molded the postmodern Jewish consciousness, each has also given Jews reason to deny it Jewish primacy or ultimacy. It is my conviction that the limits to our particularization come from our belief that much of the universal ethical message of modern Judaism remains true even in a postmodern era.

The Modern in the Postmodern

World Jewry's great pride in the State of Israel has largely been connected with its moral accomplishment. Few Jews expected that one could run a state and remain saintly, and, for years, whenever certain Israeli actions seemed morally questionable, they overlooked them. But, in the 1980s, believing ethics to be central to Judaism, and Jewish morality the key to Jewish continuity, the situation changed. The realization that much of Israel's citizenry and its leaders had a radically different

view of Jewish obligation, finally brought many of them, and even some of their organizations, to the point of public dissent and private dissociation from the State of Israel. From this experience, I infer that, for all of our intensified ethnicity, we so strongly retain a commitment to modern ethics that it can occasionally take precedence over the unique focus of our ethnic pride, the State of Israel.

Not the least evidence leading to this conclusion has been a parallel development in the State of Israel itself. The incursion into Lebanon and the response to the Intifada caused many Israelis such unsettling ethical distress that it has led to an unprecedented division over national purpose and character. In their exposed and dangerous situation, they have very much more at stake in whatever decisions are made than anyone else. Nonetheless, they face the same conflict of values that confronts Diaspora Jews: To what extent should the universalistic ethics of Judaism, espoused by us in our modernity, influence our postmodern Jewish commitment to ethnic self-respect?

This same return of our repressed modernity emerges in our renewed spirituality. The attractive assets of contemporary orthodoxies, their certain standards and their close-knit communities, appeal greatly by contrast to liberalism's moral flabbiness and personal uncertainty. Yet, these very strengths contain such potential dangers that they prevent most Jews from accepting the new (or old) Orthodoxy. Those who truly know what God specifically wants of us can tolerate only quite limited dissent. Seeking or achieving political power, orthodoxies can channel their absoluteness into what most Jews would call extremism, zealotry, and fanaticism — and we have seen too many examples of this phenomenon, both in our community and without, not to be disenchanted with claims to absolute truth. It seems far more reasonable to most Jews to affirm another motif of modern Judaism: that all human beings necessarily have a limited knowledge of God's will. Though we passionately stake our lives on such knowledge of God as we do possess, we think that our limited understanding requires us to live in peaceful mutual regard with those whose faith radically disagrees with ours; even our postmodern religiosity must foster pluralism, and practice the spirituality of democracy.

The continuing modernity-of-our-postmodern-spirituality has been epitomized by the anomalous invocation of the concept of *tikkun olam* as a Jewish call to ethical action. This represents a remarkable transformation of this term, which was first used in the Talmud to provide a pragmatic justification for certain compromises that the rabbis made between clashing values in the law. Thus, its earliest Jewish meaning was something like "good social policy." In the 16th century, the Lurianic *kabbalah* utilized the phrase to designate a human mystical task. Luria's cosmogony taught that God's act of creation resulted in a shattered material world, which the Jewish people was brought into being

to “mend” (*tikkun*), thus, eventually, bringing the Messiah. We were to do so by meticulously observing the commandments, accompanying each deed by a mystical intention to restore the channels of grace between the upper and the lower worlds that were specific to this act. In particular, this system stressed the value of *kavanot*, the mystic commentary-intentions that the adepts created for each required prayer and act. Today’s *tikkun olam* has little or nothing to do with halakhic adjustments or mystical intentions. Rather, it summons us to Jewish ethical duty, most often of a universal cast — but, in keeping with our intensified postmodern particularity, it legitimates this remnant of modernity by cloaking it in a classic Jewish term.

In sum, this dialectical postmodern evolution has brought much of world Jewry to a paradoxical spiritual situation. We are too realistic about humankind to return to the messianic modernism which once animated us. Instead, we sense that we derive our deepest understanding of what a person ought to be, and what humankind ought to become, from participating in the Covenant, our people’s historic relationship with God. But not exclusively. The Emancipation was not altogether a lie. It taught us something true about our limited knowledge of God’s will, the dignity of each person, and about the democracy and pluralism which make it effective and that must be carried over into our post-modern Judaism. These affirmations — corporate Covenant and self-determination — can easily come into conflict, yet we propose to live our lives affirming both of them. I understand it to be the task of Jewish theology today to give a faithful, thoughtful explication of this paradox.

Ve'zot Ha-Torah — A Liturgical Reassurance

JEFFREY M. COHEN

THE BIBLICAL VERSE WHICH WE SING WITH considerable gusto, when the *Sefer Torah* is raised aloft, presents us with three major difficulties.

The verse reads, *Vezot ha-Torah asher sam Mosheh lifnei Benei Yisrael al pi Adonai beyad Mosheh* — “And this is the law that Moses set before the children of Israel, according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses.” The first difficulty is that this is an artificially created verse from the Torah, made up of two quite separate quotations. As the verse stands, therefore, it actually infringes a halakhic norm not to interrupt or abbreviate a Biblical verse. This principle is clearly expressed in the Talmud: *kol pesuka dela paskei Mosheh, anan lo paskinan* — “In any Biblical verse, we may not conclude other than where Moses concluded.”¹ It may also be translated: “We may not create (artificially) any Biblical verse that Moses did not create.”

If we consult Deut. 4:44, we will find the first part of our quotation — *Ve'zot ha-Torah asher sam Mosheh lifnei Benei Yisrael* — as a sentence complete unto itself. The rest of the quotation — *al pi Adonai beyad Mosheh* — comes from Numbers 4:37, repeated again in v.45 (see also v.49), in both verses of which it occurs as the concluding phrase. To lift part of a Biblical verse out of context, and graft it on to another verse in that way, constitutes, as we have observed, a masoretic and halakhic impropriety.

The second difficulty is that the latter, offending Biblical snippet derives from a context which has absolutely no bearing upon the subject of the Torah, adding further to the mystery of why our early liturgists should have been so eager to cull it as a concluding component of the *Ve'zot ha-Torah* verse!

The third and final difficulty is that the fusion of the second component creates a superfluous repetition: “This is the law which Moses set . . . according to the word of the Lord *by the hand of Moses*.”

None of these problems is novel, and they are referred to already by the renowned halakhist, Yechiel Michael ben Aaron Ha-Levi Epstein

1. B. Ber. 13b.

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(1829-1908), in his *Arukh Ha-Shulhan*.² While defining the problems as *kashe tuva* (extremely difficult to resolve), he attempts no solution. The problems are re-iterated by his son, Barukh Ha-Levi Epstein of Pinsk (1860-1942), in his interesting liturgical commentary, *Barukh She'amar*.³ He also can offer no explanation, and ends, most uncharacteristically, with the admission: "I know not how to resolve all this."

Our sources are strangely silent regarding the period when this hybrid verse was synthesized and first introduced into our liturgy. Rabbi Avraham Werdiger, editor of *Siddur Tzelota De'Avraham*,⁴ states that the first reference to it occurs in the Siddur of the *Shelah* (R. Isaiah Horowitz, 1565-1630). Horowitz was immersed in Kabbalah, and much influenced by the manuscript notes of Isaac Luria, Moses Cordovero and Joseph Karo, the earlier pioneers and luminaries of mysticism in Erez Yisrael (where Horowitz settled in 1621). "He held that the time had come to reveal the secret wisdom of the Zohar as a preparation for the imminent redemption."⁵ Although Horowitz had a propensity towards the introduction of mystical formulations, he invariably quotes the source upon whose authority he relies; and he would certainly not have created and introduced into the official liturgy such a hybrid verse *without explanation and justification*. It is obvious that he was merely "revealing" a formula that had hitherto been transmitted and recited orally in synagogues, but which earlier editors had suppressed from their editions because it was in flagrant conflict with Talmudic and halakhic tradition.

As far as Horowitz was concerned, the formula might have been known to him from the Ashkenazi traditions of the communities of Poland and Germany, where he occupied rabbinical positions, or from the Sephardi traditions with which he was familiar through his study of mystical sources, as well from his many contacts in Safed and Jerusalem, the two cities where he passed the last decade of his life.

In the absence of sources which might shed some light on the problem, we might suggest a simple solution — to justify the creation of such a hybrid and problematic Biblical quotation — by viewing it in the context of the *Keri'at ha-Torah* to which it is an accompaniment. In the Sephardi rite the scroll is lifted up, and that verse is recited before the Reading of the Law, whereas in the Ashkenazi rite it follows the Reading of the Law.

The *Keri'at ha-Torah* is characterized by the designation of a specific number of *Keru'im* — people "called up" to make a blessing over (originally actually to perform the reading of) the Torah. On Sabbaths, we

2. See Yechiel Michael Ha-Levi Epstein, *Arukh Ha-Shulhan* I, sec. 134:3 (Tel Aviv, undated), p. 233.

3. See Barukh Ha-Levi Epstein, *Barukh She'amar* (Tel Aviv: Am Olam, 1979), p. 190.

4. A. Werdiger, ed., *Siddur Zelota de' Avraham* (Tel Aviv, 1963), I, p. 373.

5. Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971), 8, 991.

call up seven people; on Yom Kippur, six; on festivals, five; on *Rosh Hodesh* and *Hol ha-Mo'ed* four; on Mondays, Thursdays, Sabbath afternoons, Hanukah and Purim, three.

Judaism has always taken very seriously the prohibition against designating human beings by number, contained in Ex. 30:12: "When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel, according to their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when thou numberest them, *"that there be no plague among them when thou numberest them."*

King Saul conducted a census of his fighting men, prior to launching an attack on the Amalekites. The Bible states: "And Saul summoned the people — *vayyifkedeim ba-Tela'im* — and he numbered them in *Tela'im*."⁶ This is the rendering followed by most translators, who regard *Tela'im* as a place name, probably identical with the name *Telem*,⁷ in the Negev of Judah.⁸ The Talmud, however, prefers to explain that rather obscure word as identical to the Hebrew noun *taleh*, a lamb:

Rabbi Isaac said: "It is forbidden to count Israel even for a religious purpose . . . This is derived from the verse: 'And he numbered them *by means of lambs*."⁹

Rashi explains that Saul instructed the people each to select one lamb from the king's stalls, and lead it into a broad place, where the lambs, instead of the people, were counted.¹⁰

This Talmudic explanation of the word *tela'im*, as "lambs,"¹¹ overcomes the difficulty of how King Saul was permitted to initiate a census of the Israelites. By employing a substitute object — in this case lambs —

6. I Sam. 15:4.

7. See Jos. 15:24.

8. This identification is suggested in F. Brown, S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1957), p. 378, sub. *Telem*.

9. B. Yoma 22b.

10. See Rashi on I Sam. 15:4 (D.H. *Vayyifkedeim*).

11. It is somewhat surprising that *Tosafot Yeshanim* (on Yoma 22b), followed by the *Mezudat Ziyon* commentary on I Sam. 15:4, saw the need to state emphatically that *Tela'im* is, first and foremost — i.e., "according to the *peshat*" (*Tos. Yesh.*) — a place name, quite apart from the Talmudic interpretation of the name. Rashi, on the other hand, gives only the Talmudic sense of the word, rejecting any suggestion that *tela'im* might be a place name. Only Rashi's approach can in fact be harmonized with the Talmudic understanding of the text, which, by simple inference, may be seen to reject outright the place name theory. For, the very reason why the Talmud, in the exposition under review, rejects I Sam. 11:8 ("And he numbered them *be'vezek*" — which latter word Rashi renders, "by means of pieces of potsherd") as a proof-text for the prohibition of a direct head-count, is that that word may be rendered as a place name. Hence, the Talmudic employment of the phrase *vayyifkedeim batela'im* (I Sam. 15:4) as the phrase most suited to convey the point that only a substituted object, such as "lambs," may be used in a census. Clearly, the Talmud was of the opinion, therefore, that the word *tela'im* had only one connotation, that of "lambs" (see *MaHaRShA* on Yoma 22b). It is perplexing therefore, how such traditional commentators as *Tosafot Yeshanim* and *Mezudat Ziyon* could even consider the possibility that it might be a place name!

he was, of course, following a similar method to the one recommended in Ex. 30:12.

R. Samuel Edels (1555-1631), in his Talmudic commentary *Hid-dushei MaHaRShA*,¹² raises a pertinent problem on the above comment of Rabbi Isaac: If that sage wished to give a warning against head counting, why then did he resort to a proof-text from the episode of Saul, in preference to the original Pentateuchal source of Ex. 30:12, with its stern threat of *negef* (dire punishment) for transgressing the prohibition?

Edels' answer is that, from the Pentateuchal prohibition, with its description of the half-shekel as a "ransom," it may be inferred that it was introduced only because a gesture of atonement was required for a grievous sin, probably that of the Golden Calf. That would explain why the Torah employed the phrase *lekhaber al nafshoteikhem* ("to make atonement for your souls"),¹³ and why it describes the half-shekel coin as *keseif ha-kippurim* ("atonement money").¹⁴ By that special contribution, the nation would be granted protection against retribution, as it states, *ve'lo yihyeh bahem negef bifikod otam* ("that there be no plague among them when you number them").¹⁵ King Saul's census, however, was not linked to any sin, so that no "atonement" interpretation could be placed upon his choice of lambs, other than that it was to circumvent a Biblical prohibition against counting heads. The lambs could not possibly be related to some mass atonement that may have been required, since it is quite clear that the lambs were the property of the king, and one cannot secure atonement by means of someone else's offering.

King David is severely censured by God, through the prophet Gad, for having numbered his forces.¹⁶ In retribution, David has to choose one of three punishments: seven years of famine, three months of banishment and pursuit by his enemies, or three days of pestilence. He chooses the latter as punishment for counting Israel.¹⁷

A Talmudic tradition¹⁸ seeks to explain how King David could have overlooked such a clear prohibition, "which even school-children are aware of, since it is written in the Torah: *When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel, according to their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord*, etc. . . ." The Talmud goes on to explain that Satan was given free rein to trap David into sin because David had employed a most offensive expression with reference to God, saying to Saul, "If it is the Lord that *has enticed you* . . ." ¹⁹

12. See *MaHaRShA*, *ad loc.*

13. Ex. 30:15.

14. *Ibid.*, v.16.

15. *Ibid.*, v.12.

16. II Sam. 24:11-15.

17. See v.15.

18. B. *Ber.* 62b.

19. I Sam. 26:19.

Although Isaac Abarbanel attempts to prove that the prohibition against taking head-counts was restricted to early Biblical times, and was not intended to be a *mizvah le'dorot* (a command for posterity),²⁰ the consensus view of our classical commentators and halakhists was not in agreement with him.²¹ Indeed, it is difficult to see how Abarbanel could possibly sustain such a view, which directly conflicts with the above-mentioned, uncontested Talmudic statement of Rabbi Isaac that "it is forbidden to count Israel, even for a religious purpose." That particular source even quotes a dispute between R. Eleazar and R. Nahman bar Isaac over whether one who counts Jews transgresses one or two negative Biblical precepts!²²

Abarbanel also seems to have overlooked the fact that the prohibition was taken so seriously during the 1st century, C.E., that, according to Talmudic tradition, even the Herodian King Agrippa, eager to discover the number of pilgrims present in Jerusalem for Passover, had to resort to the hopelessly inaccurate method of instructing the High Priest to count the number of kidneys left over from the Paschal lambs.²³ This method was inaccurate because several people participated in the consumption of the lamb taken by each family. A far more precise method would have been to post officials at the gates of Jerusalem, and to take an accurate head count as people entered. That Agrippa did not do so was of particular significance to the Talmud, and it is obvious that his motive was to avoid offending the sensibilities of the religious authorities, for whom counting heads was anathema.

The fear of numbering people continued undiminished throughout the medieval period. The rationale is that same *ayin ha-ra* (evil eye) mentioned in the *Shulhan Arukh* in connection with the fear of consecutively calling to the Torah members of the same family:

One may (halakhically) call up two brothers, one after the other, or a son after his father. They did not permit this, however, because of the evil eye. And even if one is called to the seventh portion and the other to the maftir, they should not call up the second member of the family by name because of the evil eye (Maharil).²⁴

According to the popular superstition, to give a high profile on the *bimah*, at one and the same time, to members of the same family, especially when religious honours were being distributed, was to invite and activate the unwanted attention of those demonic forces envious of human pleasure. The latter — it was believed — were more than happy to link themselves to anyone possessing particularly malevolent

20. See the lengthy essay of Isaac Abarbanel in his commentary to II Sam. ch. 24.

21. See Rashi on Ex. 30:12 and Nu. 1:2; also Nahmanides on Ex. 30:12, and note in Chavel ed. (Jerusalem, 1959), p. 488.

22. See B. *Yoma*, *ad loc.*

23. B. *Pes.* 64b.

24. *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 141:6.

and jealous emotions, occasioned by their envy of those fortunate enough to be surrounded by a large family, or a family enjoying the honours bestowed by the congregation.

Joshua Trachtenberg²⁵ has filled in the background to these superstitious beliefs, and Jacob Z. Lauterbach has demonstrated how they lie at the basis of, or at least have affected the celebration of, a number of basic Jewish rituals, such as the breaking of a glass at weddings, and the rituals of *Kapparot* and *Tashlikh*.²⁶

A few quotations from Trachtenberg's classic study, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, will help to explain the very real fear, felt by the masses in ancient and medieval times, of the "evil eye" and of those who were able to employ it for individual or communal hurt:

The "evil eye" (is) one of the most widely feared manifestations of demonic animus . . .

Not a few unfortunate men are born *jettatori*, shedding rays of destruction about them with every glance, frequently themselves unaware of their dread influence. . . . There are baleful glances, just as there are malevolent men, and the superstitious imagination tends to run away with itself.

Any act or condition that in itself may excite the envy of the spirits is subject to the evil eye: *taking a census or even estimating the size of a crowd* (my ital.); possession of wealth; performing an act which is normally a source of pride or joy — all evoke its pernicious effects. A father leading his child to school for the first time took the precaution to screen him with his cloak. Members of a family were reluctant to follow each other in reciting the blessings over the Torah before a congregation. A double wedding in one household, or, indeed, any two simultaneous marriages, were avoided for this reason.²⁷

To this day, Orthodox congregations, when they need to determine whether they have the requisite number of ten males for a *minyan*, do not take a head count, but allocate to each person present a succeeding word of a Biblical verse — the most popular being Ps. 28:9 — containing ten words. If the entire verse is allocated, it is clear that the required quorum is present, and the service may proceed!

There must, accordingly, have been considerable unease when it came to the Reading of the Law and the necessity for the synagogue wardens to make a prior "selection" of specific individuals to constitute the required number of *keru'im*, as the occasion demanded. Many must

25. See Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (N.Y.: Behrman's Jewish Book House, 1939).

26. See Jacob Z. Lauterbach, "The Ceremony of Breaking a Glass at Weddings," *H.U.C.A.*, 1, (1924), pp. 427-466; "The Ritual for the Kapparot Ceremony," in *Jewish Studies in Memory of G.A. Kohut* (N.Y., 1935), pp. 413-422; also, "Tashlikh: A Study in Jewish Ceremonies," *H.U.C.A.* 11 (1936), pp. 207-340.

27. Trachtenberg, *Op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

have queried the halakhic propriety of such a "selection;" others would have accepted their *aliyyah* with no small degree of apprehension.

There was, of course, no way out of this dilemma if the traditional system of calling specific numbers of people was to be maintained. Some method had to be devised, therefore, of demonstrating to the congregation that this particular kind of reckoning was religiously sanctioned and, in consequence, could not possibly involve any danger from the demonic forces or from humans endowed with the power to wield the *ayin ha-ra*. The most effective method of demonstrating this was to draw the congregation's attention to a Biblical precedent for such sanction.

A most convenient source was Numbers, ch. 4. This lengthy chapter details the special tasks, in connection with their service in the sanctuary, delegated to the Levitical families of Gershon, Kehat and Merari. Before specifying their precise duties, and the specific components of the portable sanctuary for which each family was responsible, the very first verse of the chapter states that Moses was instructed by God to take a census of the family of Gershon, followed later in the chapter by similar instructions regarding Kehat and Merari.

It is abundantly clear from this context, therefore, that it is not only permissible, but even Divinely ordained, to take account of the specific number of a group of people when it is for a religious and ritualistic purpose in the sanctuary.

Verses 36 and 44 of that chapter give the specific numbers of the Kehatites and Merarites eligible for sanctuary duty, and the following verses, 37 and 45 respectively, round off the topic in the words, "These are they that were numbered of the families of the Kehatites (v.45: "of the sons of Merari") whom Moses and Aaron numbered — *al pi Adonai beyad Mosheh* — according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses."

Because of the perceived mortal danger that the Kehatites and Merarites were in, on account of their regular and unprecedented proximity to the sacred objects and components of the Sanctuary, God instructs Moses and Aaron to be personally responsible for their safety — "Be not the cause of the destruction of the tribe of the families of the Kehatites" (Nu. 4:18) — presumably by adjuring them on each occasion, before they approached their particular mission, to be careful to treat the sanctuary with awe and dignity, and to avert their gaze where necessary.²⁸

But there is another way in which their protection is to be assured. "This is what you shall do for them, that they may live and not die, when they approach the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in, and appoint them every one to his service and to his burden" (v.19). In other words, as long as the administrators of the sanctuary/

28. See *Rashbam* on Nu. 4:20.

synagogue are seen to be the ones designating those about to embark upon a specific public duty or *mizvah* in the house of God, there can be no fear of any harm befalling those so designated. This, in fact, is the main thrust of the later phrase, *al pi Adonai beyad Mosheh*, according to the Tosaphistic commentators.²⁹ It comes to remind us, in the context of the census of the Kehatites and Merarites, that no harm did come to them, and their numbers were never depleted, on that account, since God had already forewarned Moses (in Nu. 4:18) how to ensure their total safety.

Once the phrase, *al pi Adonai beyad Mosheh*, had taken on that specific connotation of Divine protection against danger, it is not surprising to find it used on one further occasion in that special context.

Nu. 9:15-23 refers to the erecting and dismantling of the portable sanctuary. (Although not referred to in the passage, the Kehatite and Merarite role in those tasks is, again, not too far in the background of the reader's mind). It refers also to the pillar of cloud by day, and fire by night, that served as symbols of Divine protection. Appropriately, therefore, the phrase *al pi Adonai beyad Mosheh* — contextually supercharged as it is already with a protective connotation — is employed to climax the passage (v.23).

Because of the importance of justifying, to fearful and superstitious congregants, the practice of *selecting a specific number of people* to be called up whenever there was a reading from the Torah, the authorities felt — we suggest — that a specific allusion to that sanctuary census was an ideal method of allaying fears. Hence, the culling of the *al pi Adonai beyad Mosheh* element from that particular context in the book of Numbers, and its transplantation into the Deuteronomic *Ve'zot ha-Torah* verse. Although that grafted element comes from a passage wherein there is absolutely no allusion to the Torah, yet, taken in isolation, its import can easily be switched to that connotation, since the Torah was, indeed, given, "according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses."

It was the importance of justifying the synagogue practice of designating people by number that explains why the authorities who recommended its introduction, in their desire to avail themselves of the most convincing justification, were even prepared to make an exception to their own rule of not tampering with Biblical verses. Possibly they felt that the literal sense of the Talmudic regulation, referred to above, prohibited only *shortening* a verse, by stopping before the place where Moses concluded it. In this particular instance, however, they were actually *lengthening* the verse by the addition of an extra phrase.

The issue to be overcome would have been regarded as so serious that, although aware of the sensibility to style that the early liturgists and religious poets always displayed, and their care to avoid tautology,

29. See *Da'at Zekeinim mi-Ba'alei ha-Tosaphot* on Nu. 4:37.

the authorities who prescribed this hybrid Biblical formula had no choice in this instance, however, but to employ that extraneous phrase *al pi Adonai beyad Mosheh*, notwithstanding the awkward double reference to the agency of Moses in the giving of the Torah that was now created thereby within the single, expanded verse.

The explanation we have offered may appear more plausible in the context of the Sephardi rite, wherein the verse is recited before the *Keri'at ha-Torah*, and constitutes, therefore, an assurance to those who may be selected presently to be called up that they have nothing to fear from the evil eye or any other such malevolent force that may attach itself to a numbered entity. The Sephardi practice was, indeed, the original, as recorded in the Talmudic tractate *Soferim*.³⁰ However, even according to the Ashkenazi rite, wherein the verse is declaimed after the Torah has been read, it would also serve the desired purpose of assuring those already called up that they had nothing to fear on that score.³¹

I have suggested elsewhere that the custom of lifting up the Torah Scroll and exhibiting it to the entire congregation arose at "an early period when many different genres of literature in scroll form abounded in Judaea. Some of those were sectarian, as, for example, the Dead Sea Scrolls; others were totally secular. In order to reassure those about to be called up to read, as well as the rest of the congregation, that the text was the authentic sacred version, they held it aloft for all to examine before commencing the reading."³²

We see, therefore, that the principle of "reassuring" the congregation that everything is in conformity with tradition, especially in relation to the reading of the Torah, is well established. It does not stretch the imagination, therefore, to assume that a reassurance regarding the propriety of counting and designating the people to be called up was also required.

Liturgical compositions inserted — or expunged³³ — in order to offer "reassurance" to the faithful are quite common, as are rituals introduced for polemical, anti-sectarian purposes. The *Bi'yeshivah shel ma'alah* prelude to the *Kol Nidrei* composition, is probably the most well-known example of a liturgical statement of reassurance. The phrase *anu matirin lehitpallel im ha-avaryanim* ("we declare it permitted to pray with the transgressors") is referred to by R. Eliezer bar Yoel HaLevi

30. See tractate *Soferim* 14:14 (ed. M. Higger, 14:8, p. 262).

31. On the differences between the Ashkenazi and Sephardi practices regarding the lifting up (*hagbahah*) and exhibiting of the Torah scroll, see *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 134:2, and gloss of Isserles *ad loc.*

32. Jeffrey M. Cohen, *Horizons of Jewish Prayer* (London: United Synagogue Publications, 1986), p. 241.

33. A classical example of a passage being expunged from the liturgy is the Decalogue, which was recited daily in pre-Christian times (See *Mishnah Tamid* 5:1), but was expunged "because of the false assertions of the heretics" (*Ber.* 12a).

(*Raviah*) of Bonn as a reference to reprobate members of the community who had had imposed upon them the ban of excommunication. The terms of the ban included a prohibition for the latter to join the community in prayer. On the holiest night of the year, however, the ban was temporarily suspended. Nevertheless, the congregation had to be "reassured," by the recitation of that *Biyesshivah* formula, that it was, indeed, "permitted (by the authority of the Court on High and by the authority of the earthly court) to pray with the transgressors."³⁴

* * *

While it may be considered a very subtle means of reassurance, merely to borrow part of a phrase from one context with the objective that it should attract into its new setting all the attendant background circumstances of its original context, yet it has to be said that such subtlety is precisely the hallmark of liturgical polemic.

For a parallel to such a subtle utilization of a Biblical verse as a polemical indicator, along the lines postulated above, we have to look no further than the liturgical alteration of the Biblical verse *Yozer or u'vorei hoshekh, oseh shalom u'vorei ra* — "Who forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates evil" (Is. 45:7). In the liturgical *Yozer* blessing of the Morning Service, the last phrase is replaced by *u'vorei et ha-kol* ("And creates *all things*"). This was a polemical exercise in order to remove a reference that might lend credence to the Persian dualistic concepts of two Gods: one a source and sustainer of good, the other a source and sustainer of evil (*borei ra*).³⁵

Another example is the introduction into the Friday night liturgy of the recitation of Mishnah *Shabbat*, *perek Bameh Madlikin*, which deals with the oils and wicks permitted or prohibited for use in illuminating the home on the Shabbath. It was introduced without any explanatory or condemnatory rubric or reference, even though the rationale for its introduction was that it might serve as a clear Pharisaic — Rabbinic demonstration of their rejection of the Sadducean tradition which prohibited the maintenance of any burning lamps on the Sabbath.³⁶

The anti-Karaite blessing over those Sabbath lights, which was introduced in Geonic times, as well as the creation of a blessing over the counting of the *Omer* (even though, according to most authorities, that ritual now has only rabbinic status),³⁷ were also subtle ways of reassuring the faithful regarding any issue that may have been causing them religious concern, *particularly when some other religious tradition called into question the propriety of what they themselves were doing.*

It should not be forgotten that contextual inferences are the stock-

34. See Jeffrey M. Cohen, *Understanding the High Holyday Services* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 100-102.

35. See Jeffrey M. Cohen, *Horizons*, p. 60.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

in-trade of the Talmudist and halakhist. It should not surprise us, therefore, that such a subtle method should have been employed to justify recourse to counting people for the purpose of calling them up to the Reading of the Law.

We referred above to the association of the name of R. Isaiah Horowitz with the dissemination and popularization of our hybrid verse. The employment of certain Biblical verses as *segulot* (lit. "remedies") — formulae invested with the power to ward off evils of various kinds — was an exercise widely recommended and indulged in by Horowitz and his followers. He himself was not averse to recommending a verse of his own as preferable even to one suggested by the great kabbalist of Safed, Moses Cordovero, as a remedy for those entrapped by "strange thoughts:"³⁸

I have found a manuscript of the Divine R. Moses Cordovero, of blessed memory, and it states thus: "The venerable one (i.e., the prophet Elijah) taught me that such a person should recite several times the verse, 'And the fire upon the altar shall be kept burning thereby, it shall not go out'" (Lev. 6: 5). But it appears to me that it is preferable to recite the verse, "I hate them that are of a double mind, but Thy law do I love" (Ps. 119:113).³⁹

Abraham M. Sperling's popular work, *Sefer Ta'amei ha-Minhagim u'Mekorei ha-Dinim*, has an entire section listing the traditional *segulot* verses recommended for dealing with the evil eye, barrenness, gynecological problems, insomnia, toothache, and other general maladies, being summoned before a king or high official, or having a bone stuck in the throat, as well as verses efficacious for financial prosperity, for improving the memory, for improving one's popularity, etc.⁴⁰

While mainstream Judaism endeavoured to resist such superstitious infiltrations, some did penetrate the net, such as the custom of saying the words *Savri maranan* before reciting in public the blessing over wine. Sources⁴¹ refer this to the context of either Adam or Noah, for both of whom the vine was their undoing. According to one Talmudic opinion, the Tree of Knowledge, the eating of which brought mortality into the world, was a species of vine.⁴² It was similarly as a result of the fruit of the vine that Noah became disgraced, culminating in the eternal curse upon the Canaanite descendants of his youngest son. The uttering of the phrase *Savri maranan* ("I am mindful", "I am hopeful"⁴³ that

38. On the doctrine of the elevation of strange thoughts (*mahshavot zarot*), as developed in Hasidism, see L. Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer* (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1978), pp. 104-120.

39. Avraham Sperling, *Sefer Ta'amei ha-Minhagim u'Mekorei ha-Dinim* (Jerusalem: Eshkol Publ. House, 1957), pp. 565-566.

40. Ibid., pp. 563-576.

41. See *Shibbolei ha-Leket* of Zedekiah ben Avraham (13th cent.), sec. 140, and *Ateret Zekeinim*, sec. 189, quoted in Sperling, *Op. cit.*, p. 137.

42. B. San. 70a-b.

43. From the Aramaic verb *savar*, "to think," "to be hopeful." See Marcus Jastrow, *A*

all will be well with me) before drinking wine is, therefore, in the category of *segulah*, a formula of protection against the injurious effect of that beverage. The same sources prescribe that those present, on hearing the words *Savri maranan* being uttered, respond with the wish or assurance: *le'hayyim* ("for life!").⁴⁴

Inevitably, given the recondite or superstitious genre we are dealing with, neither rabbis nor laymen were inclined to discuss or explain publicly any of those rituals, verses or formulae that they were operating with or recommending. It would not be surprising, therefore, that the phrase *al pi Adonai beyad Mosheh* should have been introduced, and grafted onto the *Ve'zot ha-Torah* sentence — without any justification or explanation being offered — sometime between the compilation of tractate *Soferim* (8th cent.), which does not have the appendage, and the period of Isaiah Horowitz. The inclination would be to look for its origin among the circles of the 13th century pietistic movement of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*.

The reason for such an identification is that the literature of the *Hasidei Ashkenaz* "contains probably the largest extant body of demonological and magical information in medieval Hebrew literature."⁴⁵ Demons, spirits and other superstitious elements predominate in the thinking and emotions of their adherents, and "the teachings of the Hasidim contain many instructions and rules of conduct *which serve as a protection* against these powers."⁴⁶

One thing is certain, however, and that is that this hybrid verse, created for our liturgy, has become a most potent and inspiring affirmation of faith in, and adoration of, "the Law which Moses set before the children of Israel."

Dictionary of the Targumim (repr. N.Y., 1967), p. 951.

44. See *Da'at Zekeinim mi-Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* on Lev. 10:9, and Sperling, *Op. cit.*, p. 137.

45. See "Hasidei Ashkenaz," by J. Dan in *Encyc. Jud.* (Jerusalem: Keter Publ., 1972), p. 1379.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 1382.

Can Converts to Judaism Say “God of Our Fathers”?

SHAYE J.D. COHEN

CONVERTS TO JUDAISM ARE JEWS “IN ALL respects.”¹ Like native Jews they are obligated to observe all the commandments of the Torah.² To the extent that Jewish identity is based on belief and practice, a convert can become fully equal with the native, because a convert can affirm Jewish beliefs and observe Jewish practices. To the extent that Jewish identity is based on birth and lineage, however, a convert is not, and can never be, fully equal with the native, because a convert was born a non-Jew and has non-Jewish lineage. Unlike native Jews, converts have non-Jewish fathers and mothers, and this fact cannot be effaced by conversion. Religion (or “culture”) can be changed, but birth cannot. Thus, gentiles can change their religion, convert to Judaism, and join the community of Israel, but within that community they remain legally and socially distinct, because they are not absolutely equal with natives under the law and because their foreign extraction prevents them from becoming true “insiders.”³

The Mishnah and the Yerushalmi

These principles are illustrated by Mishnah *Bikkurim* 1:4-5:⁴

- A. The (following people) bring (first fruits to the Temple) but do not recite (the declaration prescribed by Deuteronomy 26:3-11):
- B. The convert brings but does not recite.
- C. because he cannot say “... (the land) which God has sworn to our fathers to give us” (Deuteronomy 26:3).
- D. But if his mother was of Israel, he brings and recites.
- E. And when he prays by himself, he says, “God of the fathers of Israel.”

1. B. *Yevamot* 47b.

2. *Mekhillah* on Exodus 12:49, *Piska* 15 (vol. 1, p. 128, ed. Lauterbach; p. 57, ed. Horovitz-Rabin).

3. See, for example, M. *Kiddushin* 4:1. For further evidence for these generalizations, see my article, “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew,” *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989): 13-33, and *Converts and Conversion to Judaism: The Rabbinic Evidence* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

4. For the manuscript evidence, see *Seder Zera'im*, ed. Nissan Sacks (Jerusalem: Institute of the Complete Israeli Talmud, 1975). This edition also provides a rich collection of medieval testimonia which I exploit below.

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F. And when he is in synagogue (with the community), he says, "God of your fathers."

G. But if his mother was of Israel, he says, "God of our fathers."

H. R. Eliezer b. Jacob says,

J. A woman who is the daughter of converts may not marry into the priesthood,

K. unless her mother is of Israel.

L. (This rule applies equally to) converts and emancipated slaves;

M. even until ten generations, (the daughters of converts or emancipated slaves may not marry into the priesthood) unless their mother is of Israel.

N. (The Mishnah lists other categories of people who bring first fruits but do not recite the declaration.)

This Mishnah treats three areas in which converts suffer legal disability because of their non-Jewish lineage: [A-D] when bringing their first fruits to the Temple, converts may not recite the declaration prescribed by Deuteronomy; [E-G] converts may not say "God of our fathers" in their prayers; and [H-M] the daughter of converts may not be married to a priest. In all three areas the legal disability disappears if the convert has a native Jewish mother.⁵

This Mishnah assumes that converts are Jews. Like other Jews, they are obligated to bring first fruits to the Temple [B] and to pray, whether by themselves [E] or in synagogue with the community [F]. They are members of the matrimonial congregation of Israel [J], that is, they may marry and be married to other Jews. But the Mishnah's validation of conversion is offset by its assertion of the legal inferiority of the convert. Other Jews recite the Deuteronomic declaration upon presenting their first fruits, but converts may not. Other Jews say "God of

5. How does a convert have a Jewish mother? The simplest explanation is that the Mishnah is referring to the offspring of a convert father and a native Jewish mother (or, *a fortiori*, the offspring of a native Jewish father and a convert mother). The word convert (*ger*) in the Mishnah refers either to a gentile who converts to Judaism or to a descendant of a convert. In several aspects of Mishnaic law, "convert" status is inherited from the father, just as Priestly (*kohen*), Levitic, and Israelitic status is inherited from the father. Thus, according to our Mishnah (clause [J]), the offspring of two convert parents inherits the status of a convert and suffers the same legal disabilities as the parents, while the offspring of a convert and a native Jewish parent (a native Jewish mother, or *a fortiori*, a native Jewish father) does not inherit the status or legal disability of the convert parent. The *Yerushalmi* suggests that the Mishnah is addressing the case of the son of a Jewish mother and a gentile father, but this interpretation is unlikely; such a son certainly can say "our fathers," but he is not a convert in any sense, and the Mishnah is speaking of converts. For full discussion, see my article, "Can a Convert to Judaism have a Jewish Mother?" in *Torah ve-Hokhmah: Studies in Halakhah, Kabbalah and Philosophy . . . in Honor of Arthur Hyman* (forthcoming). The offspring of a gentile mother and a Jewish father is a gentile by birth; if the offspring converts, he would not be able to say "our fathers," because no legal paternity exists between him and his biological father. See my article, "The Origins of the Matrilineal Principle in Rabbinic Law," *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 10,1 (1985): 19-53 (with bibliography), and "The Matrilineal Principle in Historical Perspective," *JUDAISM* 34,1 (Winter 1985): 5-13.

our fathers" in their prayers, but converts may not. Other Jews may give their daughters in marriage to priests, but converts may not.

According to this Mishnah, the legal inferiority of converts derives from their lack of Jewish "fathers."⁶ Because converts lack Jewish fathers they cannot say "*I acknowledge this day . . . that I have entered the land which the Lord swore to our fathers to give us*" (Deuteronomy 26:3) — the God of their fathers is not the God of our fathers! Because converts lack Jewish fathers they cannot pray to the "God of our Fathers" — the God of their fathers is not the God of our fathers! The daughter of converts lacks Jewish ancestry ("fathers") and therefore may not be married to a priest.

At the conclusion of its discussion of this Mishnah, the *Yerushalmi* (that is, the Palestinian Talmud) cites the following:⁷

- A. It was taught in the name of R. Judah:
- B. A first-generation convert brings (first-fruits to the Temple) and recites (the declaration prescribed by Deuteronomy).
- C. What is the reason? (Because God said to Abraham) *for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations* (Genesis 17:5). In the past you were a father to Aram, but now, henceforth, you are a father to all the nations.
- D. R. Joshua, b. Levi says:
- E. The law follows R. Judah.
- F. A case came before R. Abbahu and he rendered a decision according to R. Judah.

R. Judah [A-B] explicitly rejects the Mishnah. Like other Jews, converts are obligated to bring first fruits to the Temple and to recite the declaration. Converts can truthfully utter the Deuteronomic reference to *our fathers* because Abraham is a father to all the nations, that is, Abraham is a father to all gentiles who convert to Judaism.⁸ R. Judah accepts the Mishnah's logic that all those who recite the Deuteronomic declaration must have Jewish fathers, but denies the Mishnah's assumption that converts fail to meet this criterion. According to R. Judah, converts do, in fact, have Jewish fathers — their Jewish father is Abraham [C]. R. Joshua b. Levi declares R. Judah correct and the Mishnah wrong [D-E]. The anonymous editor of the discussion supports this view by citing a story about R. Abbahu [F]. In the mid-third century CE, when R. Abbahu lived, there was no Temple in Jerusalem, and no one brought first fruits and recited the declaration. If R. Abbahu decided a case in accordance with the statements of R. Judah, it must

6. Having a mother who is "of Israel" presumably means the likelihood of having Jewish "fathers" as well. In our egalitarian and gender-conscious age, we would prefer to translate *avot* as "ancestors" rather than "fathers," and *avotenu* as "our ancestors" rather than "our fathers," but the writers of the Mishnah and their successors meant "fathers."

7. *Y. Bikkurim* 1:4, 64a Venice, 3a-b Vilna.

8. The source for this idea is *Tosefta Berakhot* 1:12, p. 5, ed. Lieberman (cited in *B. Berakhot* 13a), and numerous midrashim on Genesis 12:5.

have been a case involving the right of a convert to say "God of our fathers" while praying. R. Abbahu ruled that the convert may, indeed, say "God of our fathers," and adduced R. Judah for support. Thus, R. Abbahu extended R. Judah's ruling from first fruits to prayer.

At issue in this debate between the Mishnah and the *Yerushalmi* is the nature of the claim to possess Jewish "fathers." For the Mishnah, the claim is historical and real. Native Jews, who descend from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons, have Jewish fathers. Converts, however, do not. The fact that a gentile has changed religious allegiance and now observes the commandments of the Torah does not change the fact that a convert does not have Jewish ancestry. Converts are members of the Jewish community but their unconverted ancestors are not. A convert's past cannot be rewritten or wished away. Therefore, the Mishnah concludes, converts may not recite liturgical references to "our fathers" and are excluded by marriage laws that require native extraction.

For the *Yerushalmi*, by contrast, the claim to possess Jewish "fathers" is metaphorical and mythic. Converts do not really have Jewish ancestry, but they have a Jewish father in Abraham, the first convert and first Jew. By abandoning false gods and recognizing the true God, they are following in the ways of Abraham. Abraham is the archetype of "father" for all converts, not just from Aram but from all nations. Therefore, the *Yerushalmi* concludes, converts are not excluded by liturgical references to "our fathers."

While the *Yerushalmi* rejects the Mishnah, the *Bavli* (the Babylonian Talmud) accepts it. There is no *Bavli* tractate on *Bikkurim*, but, in another context, in another tractate, the *Bavli* cites our Mishnah as authoritative and offers no reason or source to reverse it.⁹ Thus, the debate between the Mishnah and the *Yerushalmi* is also a debate between the *Bavli* and the *Yerushalmi*. There were a fair number of converts in rabbinic circles in antiquity, in both the land of Israel and Babylonia,¹⁰ so that the rabbinic debates about the status of converts may well reflect bona fide differences of opinion concerning the status of real people. This plausible assumption cannot, however, be confirmed. The case cited by the *Yerushalmi* in [F] is the only extant rabbinic evidence showing how converts were instructed to behave — and, presumably, how they actually behaved — when praying. Otherwise, the rulings of the Mishnah, the discussion of the *Yerushalmi*, and the citation of the Mishnah by the *Bavli*, are prescriptive rather than descriptive. They do not tell us how real people were behaving in real life.

The *Halakhot Gedolot*, a compendium of rabbinic law written in Ba-

9. B. *Makkot* 19a (citing the paragraph on the Deuteronomic declaration concerning first fruits).

10. See the useful list assembled by Bernard J. Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period* (Cincinnati, 1939; repr. New York: KTAV, 1968), pp. 221-266.

bylonia in the ninth century, is the first post-Talmudic work to cite the Mishnah under discussion here. It is striking, however, that this citation does not occur in the section of the work dealing with converts and the laws of conversion, but in a chapter containing miscellaneous rules about the Temple and Temple rituals.¹¹ This author, then, under the influence of the *Bavli*, accepts the Mishnah and ignores the *Yerushalmi*, but apparently does not realize that the ruling concerning “our fathers” affects converts even in the absence of the Temple. How converts behaved in ninth century Babylonia — and they probably were very few¹² — we do not know.

The Twelfth Century and Beyond

The debate between the *Yerushalmi* and the Mishnah was revived in the latter part of the twelfth century. Here are excerpts from three reports of actual cases in which a convert’s right to say “our fathers” was challenged. The reports derive from three of the major Jewish communities of the time: Egypt, Germany, and northern France.

The fullest and most detailed report is a letter of Maimonides (1135-1204) to Obadiah the Convert. Maimonides wrote the letter from Cairo, but Obadiah’s origins and location are unknown.¹³

You ask me if you, too, are allowed to say, in the blessing and prayers you offer alone or in the congregation: “Our God and God of our fathers,”¹⁴ “Who has sanctified us through his commandments and com-

11. *Halakhot Gedolot, Hilkhhot Menahot*, vol. 3, p. 330, ed. Hildesheimer (1988). The citation would seem to belong in *Hilkhhot Milat Gerim*, vol. 1, pp. 216-223. Some Ashkenazic sources of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries claim that the authorities of the previous generations (seventh to the eleventh centuries) followed the position of the *Yerushalmi*. R. Asher, in his commentary on Mishnah *Bikkurim*, the anonymous author of the *Responsa and Decisions of the Sages of Germany and France*, ed. Kupfer (see note 17 below), and R. Hezekiah b. Jacob of Magdeburg (see note 23 below) claim that the *Sefer Vehizhir* endorses the *Yerushalmi*; the Rokeah, cited below in note 23, says that “all the Geonim” decided in accordance with R. Judah in the *Yerushalmi*. I do not know how to evaluate these claims. The extant portion of *Sefer Vehizhir* nowhere mentions the view of either the *Yerushalmi* or the Mishnah (see Freimann’s edition, 1873, p. vi). The Rokeah does not name any of the Geonim who allegedly followed the *Yerushalmi*, and if the word “Geonim” has its usual meaning of “masters of the Talmudic academies in Babylonia,” the claim seems inherently implausible (why would Babylonian Geonim follow the *Yerushalmi* rather than the *Bavli*?). If the word means simply “rabbis of olden times,” the claim is too vague to be helpful.

12. In ninth century Babylonia, virtually all converts will have been emancipated slaves to whom special rules apply; see Ben Zion Wacholder, “The Halakhah and the Proselyting of Slaves During the Geonic Era,” *Historia Judaica* 18 (1956): 89-106.

13. I have somewhat modified the translation of Isadore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader* (NY: Behrman House, 1972), pp. 475-476, who, in turn, has somewhat modified the translation of Franz Kobler, *Letters of Jews Through the Ages* (repr. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1978; 2 vols.), vol. 1, pp. 194-196. For the original text, see *R. Moses b. Maimon: Responsa*, ed. Jehoshua Blau, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: R. Mass, 1986; 2nd ed.), pp. 548-550, nr. 293. See, too, Maimonides, *Hilkhhot Bikkurim* 4:3.

14. Here and below, Twersky (following Kobler) translates “‘Our God’ and ‘God of our

manded us," "Who has separated us," "Who has chosen us," "You who have given to our fathers to inherit (a pleasant, good, and spacious land)," ¹⁵ "You who have brought us out of the land of Egypt," "You who have worked miracles to our fathers," and more of this kind.

Yes, you may say all this in the prescribed order and not change it in the least. In the same way as every Jew by birth says his blessings and prayers, you, too, shall bless and pray alike, whether you are alone or pray in congregation. The reason for this is that Abraham our Father taught the people, opened their minds, and revealed to them the true faith and the unity of God . . . Ever since then, whoever converts and confesses the unity of the Divine Name, as it is prescribed in the Torah, is counted among the disciples of Abraham our Father . . .

In the same way as he converted his contemporaries through his words and teaching, he converts future generations through the testament he left to his children and household after him. Thus, Abraham our Father, peace be with him, is the father of his pious posterity who keep his ways, and the father of his disciples and of all converts who adopt Judaism.

Therefore, you shall pray, "Our God and God of our fathers," because Abraham, peace be with him, is your father. And you shall say, "You who have given to our fathers to inherit (a pleasant, good, and spacious land)," for the land has been given to Abraham . . . As to the words, "You who have brought us out of the land of Egypt" or "You have done miracles to our fathers" — these you may change, if you will, and say, "You who have brought Israel out of the land of Egypt" and "You who have done miracles to Israel." If, however, you do not change them, it is no transgression, because since you have come under the wings of the Divine presence and confessed the Lord, no difference exists between you and us, and all miracles done to us have been done, as it were, to us and to you . . . There is no difference whatever between you and us. You shall certainly say the blessing, "Who has chosen us," "Who has given us (his Torah)," "Who has taken us for his own," and "Who has separated us": for the Creator, may He be extolled, has indeed chosen you and separated you from the nations and given you the Torah . . .

The letter concludes with a citation of the *Yerushalmi* to prove that a convert may say "God of our fathers."

The second report is transmitted by R. Eliezer b. Joel Halevi (known as the Ravyah, c.1140-c.1225) in the name of his father. The incident that concerns us, relating to a convert, took place in Würzburg. ¹⁶

A spirit came forth from God and rested on the heart of this man, fathers'." In this translation, the convert's right to say "Our God" is as much an issue as his right to say "God of our fathers." I think this translation is wrong because I see no evidence that converts were ever prohibited from saying "our God." The word "our God" is simply the first part of the phrase "our God and God of our fathers."

15. Here and below, this phrase is mistranslated by Twersky (following Kobler). It is a quotation from the second paragraph of the Grace after Meals. The Maimonidean version differs slightly from the one in use today; see "The Oxford Manuscript of Maimonides' Book of Prayer" in Daniel Goldschmidt, *On Jewish Liturgy: Essays on Prayer and Religious Poetry* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978), pp. 215-216.

16. *Sefer Ravyah*, ed. V. Aptowitz, vol. 2, pp. 253-256, nr. 549.

R. Abraham b. Abraham our Father. And when the spirit rested on him, he drew near to the work of God to seek out the Lord and to study scripture and the holy language. He dwelt with us for a long time, and was meek and upright, "a dweller of tents." One day I, who am signed below, found him sitting and copying a pentateuch from a book belonging to priests and unfit for use. I said to him, "What is this that you have?" He replied and said to me, "I know the language of priests but I do not know the holy language. It (the book of the priests) is like a commentary (on scripture) for me. Furthermore, the sages of Speyer lent me books belonging to priests in order to copy them, and have not interfered with me. If this is wrong in your eyes, I shall cease and desist." I replied to him, "Know that this action in my opinion is wrong." (R. Joel discusses his decision and concludes that it was wrong, because in reality the convert's action was not prohibited.) . . .

Furthermore, he told me that in Würzburg he was prevented from praying in the place of the representative of the congregation (that is, he was prevented from serving as a cantor). It seems to me that they (who prevented him) went diving in mighty waters and brought up clay in their hands, for even though we learn in the Mishnah (here R. Joel quotes the Mishnah cited above) . . . nevertheless in the *Yerushalmi* it states (here R. Joel quotes the *Yerushalmi* cited above) . . . and the law follows the *Yerushalmi*. And he (the convert R. Abraham) prevailed upon me to make my opinion public, and this I did . . .

The third report comes from the school of the *Tosafists*, glossators on the Talmud who lived in northern France (and Germany) in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The authorities mentioned here are R. Jacob of Ramerupt (known as Rabbenu Tam, 1100-c.1171) and his nephew, R. Isaac of Dampierre.¹⁷

It once happened that a convert was leading the assembled diners in the grace after meals, and they began to complain against him: how could he say, "You who have given to our fathers to inherit a pleasant, good, and spacious land"? [The case came before Rabbenu Tam.] Rabbenu Tam responded (that the convert may not lead the grace after meals): we learn in tractate *Bikkurim* (here R. Tam quotes the Mishnah cited above) . . . But R. Isaac disagrees with this, and adduces proof from the *Yerushalmi* (here R. Isaac quotes the *Yerushalmi* cited above) . . . Converts at this time are accustomed to say "God of our fathers" in accordance with R. Judah (in the *Yerushalmi*) . . . (Rabbenu Tam and R. Isaac proceed to debate the correct interpretation of the *Yerushalmi*.)

These reports show that, in certain circles throughout the medieval Jewish world, the liturgical disabilities imposed on the convert by the Mishnah not only remained in force but had been extended and strengthened. In Egypt, advocates of the Mishnah sought to prohibit a convert from saying the phrase "our fathers" wherever it appears in the liturgy. In Germany and France advocates of the Mishnah pro-

17. *Responsa and Decisions of the Sages of Germany and France*, ed. Efraim Kupfer (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1973), pp. 101-105, nr. 60. This is the fullest version of the debate between R. Tam and R. Isaac; for other versions see *Tosafot Bava Batra* 81a s.v. *limutei*, and the commentary of R. Asher on M. *Bikkurim* 1:4.

hibited a convert from leading the daily prayer (Germany) and the Grace after Meals (France), because converts and native Jews cannot use the same wording when reciting these texts.¹⁸ In Egypt, advocates of the *Mishnah* went even further: since converts cannot say “our fathers,” they should also abstain from all liturgical first-person plural references to the sacred history and Divine election of Israel.

In response to these developments, Maimonides, R. Joel Halevi, and R. Isaac rejected not only the expansions of the *Mishnaic* ruling but also the *Mishnaic* ruling itself. All three appealed for support to the *Yerushalmi* cited above, even though, in normal cases, a *Mishnah* endorsed by the *Bavli* would clearly outweigh a counter-position taken by the *Yerushalmi*. Maimonides’ statement, the fullest of the three, reveals that the debate does not turn on the technical question of whether a passage of the *Yerushalmi* can overturn a *Mishnah*. The heart of the matter is the status of the convert. The *Mishnaic* position, especially as extended by its medieval advocates, does not allow a convert to attain a position of normalcy within the Jewish community. Every time the congregation turns to prayer, every time Jews eat together and prepare to recite the Grace after Meals, the convert is reminded of his foreign extraction and anomalous status. For Maimonides this was intolerable.¹⁹ “Since you have come under the wings of the Divine presence and confessed the Lord, no difference exists between you and us.” We may presume that R. Joel Halevi and R. Isaac were motivated by similar sentiments.

These reports also show clearly that, in the latter part of the twelfth century, the debate between the *Mishnah* and the *Yerushalmi* had practical consequences. The eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed a perceptible rise in the number of converts, perhaps rivalling or surpassing the number in the Talmudic period. Statistics and percentages obviously are unattainable, but the extant evidence leaves the impression that the number of converts was not small, and that encounters between native Jews and converts would not have been unusual either in western Europe or in Egypt.²⁰ As a result, the status of converts became a live

18. Or, as some jurists explained in the case of the Grace after Meals, because their obligation is of a lower degree than that of native Jews. The convert encountered by R. Joel Halevi clearly had some difficulty with Hebrew, and perhaps this fact, which simply highlighted his foreignness, contributed to the decision of the community of Würzburg not to allow him to officiate as a cantor.

19. It is striking, however, that even Maimonides recommended that converts not say “our fathers” when the phrase referred to the sacred history of Israel: “As to the words ‘You who have brought us out of the land of Egypt’ or ‘You have done miracles to our fathers’ — these you may change, if you will, and say, ‘You who have brought Israel out of the land of Egypt’ and ‘You who have done miracles to Israel.’” In other words, in spite of his protestations, even Maimonides cannot quite convince himself that converts really are like natives.

20. Ben Zion Wacholder, “Cases of Proselytizing in the Tosafist Responsa,” *Jewish Quar-*

issue for many communities of the period. Some communal authorities appealed to the Mishnah to justify their sense that converts, whose education and background were so different from those of native Jews, were not readily assimilable into the community. In contrast, others appealed to the *Yerushalmi* to justify their sense that converts, who had endured hardship and danger to join the Jewish community, should be treated like natives from the moment of their conversion.²¹

Maimonides' immense authority and prestige guaranteed the victory of his position among Sefardim (the Jews of Spain and their descendants).²² Among Ashkenazim (the Jews of central and eastern Europe), however, the question was debated for some time: the authority and prestige of R. Joel Halevi and R. Isaac were more than balanced by the authority and prestige of Rabbenu Tam.²³ By the sixteenth cen-

terly Review 51 (1961): 288-315 (who discusses the question of "our fathers" on p. 302), and Norman Golb, *Jewish Proselytism — A Phenomenon in the Religious History of Early Medieval Europe* (University of Cincinnati Judaic Studies Program, Rabbi Louis Feinberg Memorial Lecture, 1987).

21. Ben Zion Wacholder argues that Sefardic authorities were more rigorous than Ashkenazim in testing the sincerity of potential converts, but that, in return, they treated converts more as equals than the Ashkenazim did. See his article, "Proselyting in the Classical Halakah," *Historia Judaica* 20 (1958); 77-96, esp. 90-91, where he discusses our debate. This distinction does not hold up, however, as there are too many exceptions to the proposed pattern. R. Isaac is no less Ashkenazic than Rabbenu Tam; R. Judah Halevi, who, in his *Kuzari* treats converts as lower-level Jews, is no less Sefardic than Maimonides. Those authorities who, like Judah Halevi, have an ethnic conception of Judaism, will inevitably assign to converts a lower place than those authorities who, like Maimonides, have a philosophical conception. I do not know the ideological underpinnings of the debate between Rabbenu Tam and R. Isaac.

22. Maimonides is cited, or is followed rather closely, by the following Spanish scholars: Nahmanides (known as the Ramban, 1194-c.1270) in his novellae on *Bava Batra* 81a; R. Solomon b. Adret (known as the Rashba, 1235-1310), a disciple of Nahmanides, in his novellae on *Bava Batra* 81a (whose endorsement of Maimonides is much more muted than that of his teacher); R. Yom Tov b. Abraham ibn Ashvili (known as the Ritba, first half of the fourteenth century, a disciple of the Rashba), in his novellae on *Makkot* 19a; R. Eshtori HaParhi (born c. 1280), *Kaftor vaFerah*, c. 42, pp. 556-567, ed. Luncz; R. Nissim b. Reuben of Gerona (known as the Ran, d. 1380), in his novellae on *Bava Batra* 81a; R. Joseph Haviya (first half of the fifteenth century), *Nimukei Yosef* on *Bava Batra* 81a (in the *Nimukei Yosef* on *Nedarim* 31a. R. Joseph explains that converts are "children of Abraham," *bnei Avraham*, but are not the "seed of Abraham," *zera Avraham*). In addition, two Provençal scholars follow a Maimonidean position: R. Abraham b. Nathan of Lunel (flourished c. 1200), *Sefer HaManhig, Hilkhhot Se'udah* 17, and R. Aaron HaKohen of Lunel (flourished c. 1300), *Orhot Hayyim*, part 1, *Hilkhhot Tefilah* 18. The Ritba and R. Abraham of Lunel confirm R. Isaac's statement that converts are accustomed to recite "God of our fathers."

23. R. Joel Halevi is followed by R. Mordekhai b. Hillel (c. 1240-1298), *Megillah*, chapter 1, sect. 786. Rabbenu Tam's view is endorsed by R. Isaac b. Moses of Vienna (c.1190-c.1260), *Or Zarua*, part 1, sect. 107, p. 20a, and by R. Meir b. Barukh of Rothenburg (known as the Maharam, d. 1293) in his responsa, ed. Moses Bloch (Berlin, 1901), p. 66, nr. 511; cf., too, *Moshav Zekenim* on Deuteronomy 26:5 (ed. Sassoon, p. 512). Rabbenu Tam may have been following the view of his grandfather, R. Solomon

ture, however, the position of Maimonides, R. Joel Halevi, and R. Isaac had triumphed. In the *Shulhan Arukh*, the code of Jewish law that would become canonical for virtually all Jews, Ashkenazim and Sefardim alike, the Sefardic R. Joseph Karo (1488-1575) follows Maimonides, and his Ashkenazic glossator, R. Moses Isserles (c.1525-1572), does not demur. Converts may say "God of our fathers," and may lead the congregation in prayer and Grace after meals.²⁴

Concluding Reflections

The integration of converts into Jewish society is no less a challenge for the Jewish community of contemporary America than it was for the Jewish communities of twelfth century Europe and Egypt. The major obstacle to their integration is the fact that we Jews see ourselves as members of an *ethnos* or nation or tribe, a people linked by descent from a common set of ancestors. This self-definition forms the basis of the ruling of the Mishnah that converts may not say "our fathers." Against the Mishnah, we moderns readily concede that this self-definition is mythic rather than historical, because we know that the Jews of the world do not constitute a single gene pool or racial type. The power of the ethnic self-definition is so great, however, based as it is on the narratives of the Tanakh, that we readily yield to self-delusion: we like to pretend that we are a single people united by ancestry and history. And because their ancestry is not our ancestry, and their history is not our history, converts remain liminal, on the margins of the community but not securely within it.

We do not need the *Yerushalmi* and the *Yerushalmi's* medieval advocates to convince us that converts should be allowed to say "God of our fathers." All of us, politically correct or not, traditionally observant or not, sense the injustice and invidiousness of the Mishnaic position. But we need the *Yerushalmi* to give us an antidote to our ingrained ethnic self-definition. Abraham, the first Jew, was also the first convert. Abraham, our father, is the father of all converts, in that he is the father of all who recognize God and accept the Torah. Thus, converts are not liminal; no less than natives, they are the children of Abraham and share fully in the blessing of the fathers.

b. Isaac (known as Rashi, 1040-1105); see Rashi's commentary on Deuteronomy 26:11. R. Isaac's view is endorsed by his disciple, R. Samson b. Abraham of Sens (c.1150-c.1215) in his commentary on M. *Bikkurim*, and by R. Eleazar of Worms (1160-1237), *Sefer Rokheah*, sect. 331. The following authorities summarize the views of Rabbenu Tam and R. Isaac but do not decide between them: R. Jacob b. Asher (c.1270-c.1343), in *Tur, Oraḥ Hayyim* 199; R. Hezekiah b. Jacob of Magdeburg (second half of the thirteenth century), as cited by R. Israel of Krems (middle of the fourteenth century), *Hagahot Oshri* on the Rosh, *Bava Batra* 81a; and *Hagahot Maimoniot* on Maimonides, *Laws of Prayer*, 8:11.

24. *Shulhan Arukh, Oraḥ Hayyim* 53:19 and 199:4.

The Concept of God in the Conservative Movement

ELLIOT N. DORFF

WHILE PROFESSOR ROBERT GORDIS concentrated his scholarly efforts on the Bible, he wrote widely on areas of theology as well. In some books and essays, he sought to delineate his own theology. These include one of his first books, *A Faith for Moderns* (1960), and his most recent book, *The Dynamics of Judaism* (1990). In other writings he set himself the task of defining the ideology of Conservative Judaism. This interest began with his book on the subject in 1945 — to my knowledge, the first book ever written on this topic — and culminated with his chairmanship of the Commission on the Philosophy of Conservative Judaism, the body which wrote the first official statement of the principles of Conservative Judaism. This paper, then, written in his honor, addresses two of his life-long interests, theology and Conservative Judaism. I surely cannot guarantee his agreement with what I will say — indeed, knowing him, I am sure that he will have some cogent criticisms! — but I sincerely hope that the effort will please him.

“Theology,” defined narrowly, refers to one’s concept of God. The term can be used more broadly to refer additionally to one’s understanding of humanity, the universe, morality, law, salvation, and the relationship of God to all of the above. This broader usage makes sense, for how one conceives of God has direct and significant implications for how one understands all of these other topics. This essay, though, will concentrate solely on conceptions of God within the Conservative Movement, using the term “theology” in its narrower meaning.

The Conservative Movement’s Theological Anxiety

If anything has characterized the Conservative Movement from its inception and in its entirety, it is its commitment to the historical approach to the Jewish tradition and its texts. This conviction is reflected in all of the educational efforts and materials of the Movement, from the earliest pre-school programs to post-graduate seminary and doctoral training.

In addition, over the years a fairly uniform pattern of observance has emerged among the rabbis of the Movement. There are, of course, differences of opinion and practice with regard to specific halakhic is-

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sues, and, in general, some Conservative rabbis tend to be rather conservative and some quite liberal in their approach to matters of Jewish law. Some people, especially those close to the Movement, are so impressed by these variations that they no longer see the broad areas of agreement and commonality which mark Conservative rabbinic practice. It would be quite easy, however, to delineate the major points of this consensus and to indicate how this Conservative mode of living the Jewish tradition distinguishes the Conservative Movement from the other forms of contemporary Judaism. As one would expect, the practices of the laypeople in all of the Movements are not as sharply differentiated. After all, most laypeople are less firmly rooted in the ideology and patterns of action of the Movement to which they belong than are their rabbis. Even so, laypeople expect that their rabbis will model a specific form of Judaism, and this affects what they consider proper to ask their rabbis to do and, to some extent, what they themselves do. The splintering off of the left end of the Movement with the establishment of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in 1968, and the disassociation of elements of the right end of the Movement after the decision to ordain women in 1983, were both, in my view, unfortunate for everyone concerned. These developments, though, have sharpened the definition of what it means to be a Conservative Jew in practice.

When it comes to theology, however, the Conservative Movement seems to be far more seriously disjointed. Thinkers associated with the Conservative Movement at one time or another have produced a rich variety of theological views. Some have been genuinely eclectic in their thought (e.g., Simon Greenberg, Louis Jacobs, Elliot Dorff),¹ while others have concentrated on one specific approach, including forms of naturalism (e.g., Mordecai Kaplan) and humanism (Eugene Kohn),² pantheism (Jacob Kohn),³ predicate theology (Harold Schulweis),⁴ ra-

1. Simon Greenberg, *Foundations of a Faith* (New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1967); *A Jewish Philosophy and Pattern of Life* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1981). Louis Jacobs, *We Have Reason to Believe* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1957), chs. 3-5; *Principles of the Jewish Faith* (New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1964), ch. 2; *Faith* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1968), entire; *A Jewish Theology* (New York: Behrman House, 1973). I also argue for an eclectic approach in "Two Ways to Approach God," *Conservative Judaism*, vol. 30, no. 2 (Winter, 1976): 58-67 (reprinted in *God in the Teachings of Conservative Judaism*, Seymour Siegel and Elliot Gertel, eds. [New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 1985], pp. 30-41) and in my forthcoming book on theology to be published by Jason Aronson Press, tentatively titled *Knowing the Unknowable: Jewish Approaches to God*.

2. Mordecai Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1934, 1957), Part Five; *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* (New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1962), entire; Eugene Kohn, *Religious Humanism: A Jewish Interpretation* (New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1953), chs. 1-3.

3. Jacob Kohn, *Evolution as Revelation* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1963), entire.

4. Harold Schulweis, "From God to Godliness: Proposal for a Predicate Theology," *Reconstructionist*, vol. 40, No. 1 (Feb. 1975); *Evil and the Morality of God* (Cincinnati: Hebrew

tionalism (Jacob Agus, Ben Zion Bokser, Robert Gordis),⁵ Hegelianism (Milton Steinberg),⁶ organic thinking à la Whitehead (Max Kadushin),⁷ existentialism of both atheistic (Richard Rubenstein)⁸ and theistic (Herschel Matt, Seymour Siegel, Arnold J. Wolf)⁹ sorts, phenomenology (Abraham Heschel),¹⁰ narrative theology (Michael Goldberg),¹¹ and linguistic analysis (Neil Gillman).¹²

The work of all of these people has been stimulating and instructive, but their diversity has been so great that many have wondered whether

Union College Press, 1984), ch. 6; *In God's Mirror: Reflections and Essays* (Hoboken, New Jersey: KTAV, 1990), pp. 73-96.

5. Jacob Agus, *Guideposts in Modern Judaism* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1954), Part Two, Section Two; Ben Zion Bokser, *Judaism: Profile of a Faith* (New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1963), chs. 3-4; Robert Gordis, *A Faith for Moderns* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1960), chs. 1, 6-9.

6. Milton Steinberg, *A Believing Jew* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), ch. 1. Steinberg's stance changed several times during his life, but in this essay he openly characterizes his position as an adaptation of Hegel (and others).

7. Max Kadushin, *A Study in Organic Thinking* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1932; New York: Bloch Publishing Company, undated, reprinted edition), esp. Chapters One and Four; *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1952), esp. Chapters Two and Seven.

8. Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966); *Morality and Eros* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), ch. 11. In the latter book, Rubenstein associates himself with Western and Oriental mysticism in that he is affirming belief in God as "the ground and source of all existence" (p. 185; this is the mystic *Ein Sof*), but Western mystics also affirm belief in the God who acts in history (the *Shekhinah*), which he is not willing to do. Since his approach in *After Auschwitz* is heavily influenced by the psychological needs of the individual, I have preferred to characterize him as an existentialist, a description which he himself adopts in the title of Chapter 6 of *After Auschwitz*.

9. Cf. their respective essays in *The Condition of Jewish Belief* (New York: Macmillan, 1966) and Arnold J. Wolf, *Rediscovering Judaism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), Introduction. Rosenzweig had considerable influence on a number of my colleagues when I was a rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in the late 1960s, and I am frankly disappointed that more of the many in the Conservative Movement who follow the existentialist approach have not stated their views in writing.

10. Of his many works, *God in Search of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1955) and *Man Is Not Alone* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Young, 1951) are especially relevant to this point. Dr. Heschel indicated his preference for associating his theology with the phenomenological approach in a conversation with Dr. David Lieber, President of the University of Judaism, and Lawrence Perlman has demonstrated that only from a phenomenological perspective can one understand the integration of the various elements of his thought; cf. Lawrence Perlman, *Abraham Heschel's Idea of Revelation* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1989). Heschel specifically rejected the description of "mystic," but some of his disciples have written in a mystic or neo-Hassidic vein (e.g. Samuel Dresner, Arthur Green).

11. Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982); *Jews and Christians Getting Our Stories Straight: The Exodus and the Passion-Resurrection* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985); both now republished by Trinity Press International, Philadelphia.

12. Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1990).

Conservative Judaism has any theological cohesiveness at all. That doubt occasions great anxiety for the leaders of the Movement, and even for its individual members. After all, we do not live in a society where commitment to Judaism is a normal feature of life. On the contrary, one must explain and justify Jewish convictions in order to convince both oneself and others. The lack of one undisputed theology within Conservative Judaism makes it seem that Conservative thinking is fuzzy, if not a total mush. How can you “sell” a product like that — even to yourself?

Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism, the first official specification of Conservative beliefs, alleviates some of this anxiety, but not as much as many had hoped it would. Its very first line asserts, “We believe in God.” It then points out that Judaism, first and foremost a *religion*, cannot possibly be detached from belief in God, and that even our self-understanding as a Jewish people requires such conviction. It also stresses the legitimacy of having doubts about God, and yet asserts the significance of our theological affirmations for the shape and character of our lives.

When it comes to delineating the content of Conservative Judaism’s belief in God, however, *Emet Ve-Emunah* declines to choose any specific theology. It says, in fact, that “Conservative Judaism affirms the critical importance of belief in God, but does not specify all the particulars of that belief.” This is not to say that *Emet Ve-Emunah* says nothing substantive about Conservative Judaism’s theological affirmations. It explicitly rules out two options — a trinitarian God or a capricious, amoral God. It also describes two, broad approaches to the meaning of affirmations of God — what Paul Tillich called “the cosmological approach” and “the ontological approach” (of which the classical, cosmological and ontological arguments are only particular examples).¹³ But it refrains from embracing and passionately promoting one specific view of God.¹⁴

Some Conservative rabbis and lay leaders wish that it would have done so. They yearn for what they perceive as the clarity and conviction of fundamentalist, Orthodox beliefs. Upon examination, though, one finds that Orthodox theologies are not nearly as monolithic as they may seem — or as many Orthodox Jews are willing to admit.

Moreover, the Conservative Movement could never, in good conscience, adopt one exclusive conception of God, fundamentalist or

13. Paul Tillich, “Two Types of Philosophy of Religion,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* (May, 1946): 3-13; reprinted in *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion*, John Hick, ed., second edition (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964, 1970), pp. 308-320.

14. *Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, The Rabbinical Assembly, United Synagogue of America, Women’s League for Conservative Judaism, Federation of Jewish Men’s Clubs, 1988), pp. 17-19.

otherwise. That would not be consonant with the pattern of multiple theologies which has emerged in Jewish history, and the Conservative Movement's commitment to historical authenticity is one of its deepest roots.

It would also be philosophically and theologically foolhardy. Philosophers have difficulty justifying our claims to knowledge about even simple things like tables and chairs; knowledge of God, if possible at all, is far more complex. Furthermore, from the point of view of Judaism, the very nature of the Holy One makes it impossible for human beings to know God fully. "God sees and is not seen," the Rabbis affirm, for, as Rabbi Joshua ben Hananya told the Emperor Hadrian, "You admit that you are unable to look at the sun, which is only one of the attendants of the Holy One, blessed be He; how much more beyond your power must it be to look at God Himself!"¹⁵ Thus, while Conservative leaders might be tempted by a clear-cut, unqualified assertion of belief, and by the assured, almost cocky tone of those who recognize only one theology, ultimately the fundamental error of such an approach must be faced. One, uncontested conception of God may make faith simple, but it does so at the price of historical authenticity and appropriate philosophical and theological modesty.

On the other hand, if virtually any theological position might be considered Conservative, what, if anything, does the Movement stand for? In producing a whole variety of suggestions, Conservative thinkers have fostered the uneasy feeling that Conservative Judaism does not really have any theology at all, that, indeed, its entire range of legal, moral, and communal commitments is based on intellectual quicksand.

Responses to This Theological Anxiety

Part of the answer, of course, is simply a matter of gaining philosophic maturity. We human beings seek certainty and security in everything we do, but life is too complex for that. In most cases the best that we can do is to formulate partial answers. In that process, intelligent and educated people can, and do, have legitimate differences of opinion because they evaluate and interpret a given situation in diverse ways. This does not mean that all opinions are equally legitimate; there are, after all, criteria by which we judge competing positions. But it does mean that we must learn to tolerate a plurality of views in all sorts of areas, and religion is certainly one of them.

Another part of the answer derives from historical considerations. The Sages of the Talmud and Midrash, who gave Judaism its distinctive cast, were quite happy to court a variety of notions of God, even if

15. God sees and is not seen: *Leviticus Rabbah*, Vayikra, 4:8; *Deuteronomy Rabbah*, Va'ethanan, 2:37; *Midrash Psalms* on Psalm 103:1 (p. 217a, par. 4). The story of Rabbi Joshua ben Hananya: B. *Hullin* 59b-60a.

those notions were not always consistent. As Max Kadushin has underscored, their thought was not tightly organized into a system; rather, it was an organic response to the fullness of life, and that meant tolerating many contrary and even contradictory notions.¹⁶ Their only concern is that we realize that all of our concepts are reactions to the manifold manifestations of one God:

R. Abba b. Memel said: God said to Moses, "You desire to know My name. I am called according to My deeds. When I judge My creatures, I am called *Elohim*; when I wage war against the wicked, I am called *Sabaot*; when I suspend judgment on a man's sins, I am called *El Shaddai* (God Almighty); but when I have compassion upon my world, I am called *Yahweh* . . . This is the meaning of the words, "I am who I am," namely, I am called according to my deeds."¹⁷

God said to Israel, "Because you have seen Me in many likenesses, there are not therefore many gods. But it is ever the same God: I am the Lord your God." R. Levi said: "God appeared to them like a mirror, in which many faces can be reflected. A thousand people look at it; it looks at all of them. So when God spoke to the Israelites, each one thought that God spoke individually to him/her. So it says, "I am the Lord your [singular] God." . . . And God says, "Not because you hear many voices are there many gods, but it is always I; I am the Lord your God."¹⁸

It was only when Jews felt the need to defend themselves against Arab and Christian intellectual onslaughts that they began to develop systematic philosophies, and tried to articulate lists of beliefs to which every Jew must subscribe. But even during the centuries of philosophical hardening, the original character of Judaism was, at least in part, maintained — in that no philosophy and no list of dogmas ever gained nearly the degree of acceptance that they have received in Christianity. On the contrary, we have had everything from rationalists (e.g., Hermann Cohen) to mystics (e.g., the Kabbalists), from supernaturalists (e.g., S.R. Hirsch) to naturalists (e.g., M. Kaplan), and we have even had total secularists (e.g., Ahad Ha'am and many in the Zionist Movement). In light of this history, then, the existence of multiple theologies within the Conservative Movement is not a regrettable fact; on the contrary, it is a mark of the Movement's historical authenticity.

There is yet another element which should soothe the theological anxiety of Conservative Jews. Specifically, theology within the Conservative Movement is not nearly as chaotic as it might seem. I want to argue, in fact, that some limits have evolved during the course of its brief history as a Movement. Its range of views is, of course, broader than its range of practice. As a result, I doubt that it would ever have anything like a heresy trial — and thank God for that! Nevertheless,

16. See n. 7 above.

17. *Exodus Rabbah*, *Shemot*, 3:6; *Tanhuma*, *Shemot*, par. 20, f. 88b.

18. *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, ed. Buber, pp. 109b-110a; ed. Mandelbaum, pp. 233-4; *Tanhuma* Buber, *Yitro*, 40a-b.

I do think that there are some limits on both the right and the left that can be delineated as a description of the theologies that various authors within the Movement have espoused up to this time. What the future will bring, of course, nobody can know, but I will be bold enough to hazard the guess that these limits will frame the Conservative theological spectrum in the future as well.

Limits on the Right

There are those in the Conservative Movement who hold quite traditional notions of God, involving the existence of a Being who is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent, who acts in history, and who is passionately concerned with human beings, especially with Jews. There have been many versions of this “traditional” belief throughout Jewish history; compare, for example, the diverse descriptions of God rendered by Philo, Halevi, and Maimonides. However the “traditional” God is construed, some rabbis and many laypeople in the Conservative Movement would want to maintain such a theology.

Despite the fact that such theologies are in some sense “traditional,” there are, I think, several demands which those who hold them would have to satisfy to consider their theologies to be properly Conservative ones. Specifically, since the ideology of the Conservative Movement is so essentially committed to intellectual honesty with regard to the history and texts of the Jewish tradition, it would require theological traditionalists to carry out an intellectual investigation and critique of their beliefs, that they not be satisfied with bifurcating faith from intellect. One limit on the right of the Movement, then, is that those who hold traditional beliefs must be prepared to deal with intellectual challenges to those beliefs in an intellectually honest way. They obviously cannot be expected to have adequate answers to all of those challenges — no one knows everything that there is to know about God — but at least they have to be open to admitting the intellectual problems involved and must deal with them as well as they can. Indeed, this limit is already articulated in *Emet Ve-Emunah*: “One can live fully and authentically as a Jew without having a single satisfactory answer to such doubts [about God]; one cannot, however, live a thoughtful Jewish life without having asked the questions.”¹⁹

Second, given what we know about the origin and development of the Tanakh, theological traditionalists within the Conservative Movement cannot be satisfied with proving the tenets of their theologies by simply citing Tanakh. Many of the Biblical figures may, indeed, have experienced revelations of God, perhaps even in verbal form, but the accounts of those encounters have decidedly been shaped by human perceptions and modes of expression. Biblical sources articulate what

19. *Emet Ve-Emunah* (at n. 14), p. 17.

the writers *understood* God to mean. Conservative Jews may, of course, ultimately arrive at a theology which is similar to, or identical with, the God described in one or another book of the Bible, and part of their belief in that God may derive from their faith in one or more events of revelation (however that process is understood). The historical, human component in the Biblical record of revelation, however, must make one recognize that a Biblical verse, while certainly evidence for what the author believed God to be, does not trump or even replace what we learn about God through other epistemological avenues like reason and experience.

These, then, constitute at least two of the limits on a traditional theology within the confines of the Conservative Movement. I do not pretend that they are totally adequate as a definition of the right wing of Conservative theologies: I am sure that some segments of Orthodoxy would be able to fit these criteria, too — although many would not. But this is as it should be: there *are* members of each of those movements whose theological beliefs are rather close. What differentiates the Conservative right wing from the Orthodox left wing, after all, involves not only theology but also views of Jewish history and law — and, of course, institutional loyalties.

Limits on the Left

It is considerably harder to delineate the limits on the Conservative left, because those who do not accept the traditional theology in any of its forms, and also do not accept the theology of Professor Mordecai Kaplan, have gone in very different directions. Many have simply avoided the issue completely for fear of what would result from a sustained attempt to articulate what they do, and do not, believe. Yet, there are some tenets that remain constant in even the most untraditional Conservative theologies, and these could legitimately be seen as the limits of the Movement's theological spectrum on the left. I shall therefore try to describe those limits, with the reminder that in doing so I hope to motivate theological discussion; I certainly do not intend or presume to cut it off.

1) *Commitment to Classical Jewish Texts.* We have already noted that the Bible, Talmud, and Midrash include a variety of notions of God, and that this diversity was expanded in both number and kind by Jewish theologians throughout the ages. Some Conservative authors have stretched the bounds even further in denying the classical notions that God has a personality (Kaplan) and that God acts in history (Rubenstein), replacing traditional Jewish theism with a naturalistic deism, a God of nature exclusively. In light of this diversity, we cannot differentiate a Jewish theology from a non-Jewish one in terms of content.

Instead, the distinguishing features will have to be found in form and function.

One important formal characteristic of theology, in contradistinction to philosophy, is that theologians speak from within a tradition. They may interpret that tradition in a radically new way or actually deny parts of it, but they act as theologians only insofar as they join their thoughts to those of the tradition out of which, and for which, they speak. In Judaism, the Bible, Talmud, and Midrash form the core of Jewish religious culture. Consequently, Jewish theologians must link their ideas to those classical sources. They are certainly not limited to those texts for their insights about life; on the contrary, one of the central ways in which any tradition is enriched is through the introduction of new ideas from other cultures. But those ideas must ultimately be brought into contact with the classical sources of the tradition and validated as a legitimate interpretation or extension of those sources by the Conservative community if they are going to serve as a new expression of it.

Second, to the extent that theologians deviate from ideas in one or more of the sources, they must explain how and why they are doing so, and why their position can nevertheless be considered an extension of the tradition. Theologians have often gone further, claiming that their interpretation is what the text had in mind all along, or that they are revealing the esoteric meaning of the text which had hitherto been open only to the initiate. Some are more circumspect and argue only that their interpretation is a possible one. In any case, *the burden of explanation* rests upon those theologians who want to interpret their tradition in an unusual way, deny part of it, or assert that something new should be added to it.

The third element in this requirement of commitment to Jewish texts is a negative one. Since Judaism, along with the other Western religions, is an exclusive religion, this requirement also means, negatively, that one must *not* affirm contradictory religious or secular texts, the philosophies of life that issue from them, and the symbols that they use. Throughout our history, we Jews have amalgamated those ideas from other cultures which we have found helpful in the exposition and development of our own faith, and sometimes the imported ideas have been considerably different from our own, as in Maimonides' adaptation of Aristotle. But there are limits to this process of ideological integration because there are philosophies which are not only different from Judaism, but completely antithetical to it, striving for totally contrary goals in life. As we have seen, *Emet V-Emunah* specifically mentions two of them, a trinitarian God and a capricious, amoral God, and there are other characterizations of God that are inconsistent with Judaism as Conservative Judaism understands it. Hence, commitment to Jewish texts has a negative as well as a positive side to it, and in that negative

side the requirement differentiates Judaism from Christianity and other religions and also from certain secular philosophies.

2) *A Particular Moral and Legal Code.* Acceptance of classical Jewish texts includes a commitment not only to carry on an intellectual dialogue with these texts, but also, once having interpreted them, to live by them. The Jewish tradition has been especially insistent on this latter component — so much so that it preferred that one do the right thing for the wrong reason rather than wait for the correct motivation,²⁰ although it obviously preferred the right act coupled with the right motive. It defined “the right” and “the good” in very specific laws and in a series of narrative, prophetic, and interpretive (Midrashic) texts. The prime basis for acting in accordance with these laws and texts was, traditionally, that God commanded them and will enforce them — although the Bible and later Jewish sources developed many additional motivations.²¹

Conservative Jewish theologians may not want to affirm this linkage of Jewish ethical and legal norms to God, but they must at least provide some substitute for justifying Jewish practice as that has come to be understood in the Conservative Movement. Reform theologians may satisfy themselves with upholding Jewish morals exclusively, and they may even seek to undermine the authority of Jewish ritual law, but Conservative thinkers must supply a religious rationale for both the moral and ritual segments of Jewish law.²²

On the other hand, in contrast to an Orthodox approach, a Conservative theology must provide for evolution in Jewish law in consonance with the historical approach to tradition. That is, a Conservative approach to Jewish law must acknowledge that there have been additions, deletions, and modifications in Jewish law in the past, and must provide a basis for appropriate changes in Jewish law in our own time as well.²³ In practice, the evolutionary approach to Jewish law within the Conservative Movement has led to a pattern of observance which is less rigid than the Orthodox version, but also broader in scope, expanding Jewish concerns to the betterment of the general community

20. *Pesahim* 50b.

21. I describe and examine these at some length in my *Mitzvah Means Commandment* (New York: United Synagogue of America, 1989).

22. Although Kaplan speaks of Jewish rituals as folkways, he also describes them as *sancta*, thereby calling attention to their relationship to religious values and concepts. Rubenstein, however, seems to divorce Jewish rituals from all religious meaning, interpreting them exclusively in psychological terms. If that reading of him is correct, he may not satisfy this criterion of a Conservative theology as I am here defining it.

23. As Prof. Nathan Rotenstreich has pointed out (“Historical Viewpoints in Judaism,” *Conservative Judaism*, vol. 28, no. 3 [Spring 1974]: 3-12), recognition of past changes does not automatically entail acceptance of a program of making additional changes in our own time. It seems to me, however, that a Conservative theology would have to include both elements even if they are logically independent.

as well, in areas such as social action and interfaith dialogue. This further links Jewish law and thought with the contemporary world. The Conservative approach has led to a tolerance of a number of different forms of Jewish observance: if you view evolution in Jewish law as an authentic and desirable phenomenon, you must acknowledge that morally upright, intelligent, and Jewishly committed people can have legitimate differences of opinion in evaluating the wisdom of retaining or changing a specific practice.

In sum, then, a Conservative theology must seek to justify Conservative Jewish practice, including (a) a commitment to constructive action for improving the world generally, (b) observance of both the moral and ritual segments of Jewish law, (c) recognition of the need and legitimacy of making ongoing modifications of that law, and (d) tolerance for the diverse patterns of observance that result from such a methodology, at least within a rather broad spectrum of behavior. That is, no matter how untraditional the doctrines of a particular Conservative theology might be, it must perform the traditional, justificatory function of Jewish theology as applied to an evolving interpretation of Jewish practice.

3) *The People Israel*. The tradition maintains that God has a special relationship with the People Israel, articulated in a covenant and involving a number of obligations which God does not require of the other nations of the world. This relationship is at the heart of God's dealings with Israel. The Bible and the Talmud thus pictured God as loving, punishing, and rewarding the People Israel much more than those texts spoke about the relationship of God to individuals. When they did speak of God's acts *vis-à-vis* individuals, they usually treated them as leaders, or at least members, of the Jewish community and not as detached persons. Israel related to God in a similar way: almost all of its prayers were in the first person *plural*, including even the individual's confessional on Yom Kippur.

While the tradition spoke of God "choosing" the Jewish people for a special mission,²⁴ some within the Conservative Movement want to follow Mordecai Kaplan in avoiding the language of chosenness, lest Jews or non-Jews misconceive that concept to mean that Jews claim special Divine privileges rather than special responsibilities. Kaplan himself preferred to speak of each nation's specific "vocation" to indicate its unique character and goals. *Emet Ve-Emunah* acknowledges that some Conservative Jews remain queasy about the language of chosenness, but it reaffirms that language even as it permits a metaphoric understanding of it:

It is undeniable that this doctrine has been distorted into an expression of moral arrogance, an attitude that the classical sources have been at

24. E.g., Deuteronomy 7:7f; 9:6; Amos 3:2.

great pains to deny. However, it cannot easily be given up, since it has decisive importance for Jewish self-perception and is essential to an understanding of the covenant idea. The truth is that the "election of Israel" and "the covenant of Israel" are two sides of the same coin; both are central to the classical Jewish world view ...

Even those who do not accept the belief in "the Chosen People" literally, can appreciate its assertion that the Jews, unlike other nations, emerged on the stage of history to be a people dedicated to the service of God. The "election of Israel," then, is the consciousness of that calling, while loyalty to the covenant suggests that its fulfillment is vital not only for Israel's continued existence, but for the well-being of all humankind.²⁵

This does not rule out other Divine covenants with other nations, as *Emet ve-Emunah* makes clear,²⁶ but it does affirm a Jewish mission to serve God as a people, and not just as individuals, in the specific Jewish way. It also links Jews worldwide to each other as fellow travellers on this special road which God has paved for us, and to that people's culture, land, and language. One thing, in fact, which, at least until recently, has distinguished the Conservative Movement from the Reform Movement, is that even those Conservative writers who prefer to avoid the language of Divine chosenness have nevertheless strongly emphasized the importance of the People Israel, its land, language, and culture. However the relationship between God and the People Israel is understood and expressed, then, a Conservative theology must account for these *upshots* of the traditional concept of God's election of Israel even if it does not do so in that language.²⁷

These, I think, are the only requirements that can be fairly de-

25. *Emet Ve-Emunah* (at n. 14), pp. 33-34.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

27. Here, again, Rubenstein's philosophy hovers on the left border of the Conservative movement, if it does not cross the boundary out of it. The atrocities of the Holocaust, he argues, were generated, at least in part, by the perception of Jews — on the part of both Jews and non-Jews — as a people of a different theological, and perhaps ontological, category. This threatened and angered the Germans and their allies, and it gave them the excuse to exterminate this anomaly of a people. Rubenstein, therefore, argues strongly for the elimination of the Chosen People concept. Kaplan, of course, did too, but Kaplan substituted the "vocation" rationale for Jews to remain committed to Judaism and the Jewish people; see his *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1956), pp. 501f. He also ties positive human commitments to contribute "creatively to human welfare and progress in the light of its own best experience" to the covenant idea; indeed, he sees that as "the modern equivalent of the covenant idea." (See his *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* [New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1947], p. 102). As far as I can tell, that kind of positive concern with continuing Jewish identity is missing in Rubenstein's writings, except to the extent that one's own national family and its modes of expression prove to be psychologically most effective for Jews in their struggle to cope with the threatening God of Nature. A Conservative theology, it seems to me, must provide a stronger ground for the conscientious and concerted efforts which have characterized the Conservative Movement's efforts on behalf of the People Israel. Somehow, that commitment must not only derive from the fact that the Jewish people happens to be mine from birth (or conversion), but from its relationship with God.

scribed as genuine limits on the left of the Conservative Movement. Many would claim that they are much too pallid and sketchy to be considered a viable Jewish theology, but they do not pretend to be a full-blown interpretation and rationale for Jewish belief and practice. These principles, rather, serve to mark off the Conservative Movement as a distinct, Jewish religious movement, and that was my aim in formulating them. Indeed, to attempt to restrict theologies within Conservative Judaism any more than this would, in my view, be futile, counterproductive, and, given the plural nature of Jewish theology over the ages, historically unauthentic.

A Diverse, but Coherent and Authentic, Approach to Theology

In the preceding pages I have tried to dispel the impression that Conservative Judaism lacks coherent and identifying theological principles. I have agreed that Conservative Jews do, indeed, have a wide spectrum of theological opinions. As a result, they are linked not so much by a particular view of God, but rather by their common, historical view of Judaism as a developing civilization and by their stress on Jewish law in its evolving form. This, of course, means that much of the security which one, authoritative theology would provide is lost. But the frustration generated by diverse views of God need not be as acute as many feel. As I have tried to show, (1) having differing theologies is perfectly in keeping with the historical tradition, and (2) within that diversity there are claims that distinguish Conservative Judaism as a coherent, theological stance. These claims form the limiting points of a spectrum — however broad that spectrum may be. Moreover, they demonstrate that Conservative Jews do hold theological beliefs in common, not in the form of clear-cut, dogmatic principles but, rather, as tacit presuppositions — as, indeed, they were for the rabbis of the Talmud. And to the extent that Conservative Jews nevertheless feel frustrated over the multiplicity of theological views extant within the Movement, they should realize that it is a healthy frustration. The ability to live with plural theologies is not only more mature than grasping at a single one; it is also much more authentically Jewish.

Barren Rachel

SAMUEL H. DRESNER

I

I SIT IN THE SYNAGOGUE. THE TIME THAT I HAVE DREADED IS ABOUT TO arrive. I am prepared, I have done all the crying beforehand. There can be few tears left . . . I am an *akarah* — a barren woman. After three years of the latest modern tests and drugs, of artificial inseminations (using my husband's sperm), of long hours in doctors' offices, of humiliating tests and frustrated hopes, and of moments of despair, I am still a barren woman. My husband is healthy; the problem is mine. We have used much of our savings, all of our patience. We have a serious operation to go that gives us a slight chance but may cause a serious risk to my health . . . so I sit in the sanctuary as I hear the words . . . *P'ru ur'vu umilu et ha'arez*. God's command to be fruitful and multiply has been given again to our people . . . [And] I feel my emptiness. As my menstrual period comes each month I mourn what could have been . . . I feel the pain of emptiness, the despair of wanting to carry out the *mizvah* and not being able.¹

So one modern Jewess poured out her heart, not unlike the cry of her ancestress, Rachel.

The Lord saw that Leah was unloved and he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren . . . When Rachel saw that she [Leah] had borne Jacob's children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children or I shall die." (Gen. 29:30, 30:1)

Why the consuming demand for children, when Jacob's love would be there in any case? Was it the maternal instinct, or envy — or something more? How ironic that the same Hebrew root, RHM, is used for "compassion" (*rahmanut*) and for "womb" (*rehem*), when she who was most compassionate (Jer. 31:15-17) was most barren! Rachel's barrenness can be understood only in contrast to Leah's fecundity. But before these questions can be taken up, several larger issues must be addressed.

II

In the West, barrenness as a religious ideal finds its origin in the early Church. Writing on the notion of virginity in the church, Peter Brown points out that the ideal of celibacy — lifelong abstinence from

1. S. Blumberg, "Akara," *Shema* 17/323, December 12, 1986. Although the Biblical commandment to "be fruitful and multiply" is halakhically applicable only to the husband, Jewish wives since the matriarchs have despaired whenever they perceived a failure on their part to help bring this commandment to fruition.

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sexual intercourse — was celebrated by early Christianity as an imitation on earth of the “life of the angels,” an altogether harmonious society “like angels in heaven” (Mark 12:25), not joined by family or marriage. This is the source of the great alternative society of the later monasteries and nunneries and the monastic orders. This Christian view has its origins in a reading of the Biblical account of Adam and Eve which understands them as destined to live a virginal, angelic, harmonious life as seraphim around the heavenly throne. They were seen as pre-social creatures, not meant to engage in sexual congress. Only because of the “fall” did they abandon their angelic status and copulate in the manner of lower creatures. Thus, early Christianity came to see family life as a falling away from the angelic to the beastly. Christianity continued thereafter to judge the institutions of marriage and family from the vantage point of humanly-angelic society, and found them sadly wanting.

What was celebrated by early Christianity as a recalling of the Garden of Eden, and in later generations became for them an alternative society, was anathema to the Jews, who believed that Adam and Eve were created not to form an “angelic society,” but for marriage and children. Thus, they reproached the 4th century Bishop Aphraat: “For you have received a curse and have multiplied barrenness.”²

Outside the “alternative society” fostered by the Church, however, barrenness was generally seen as a violation of the law of life, a denial of the Divine creative element with which woman was blessed. It is only in recent times that barrenness by choice has become an accepted secular option for women. Today, birth-control, over-population, the promise of a career, and feminist anti-family rhetoric have joined forces to lower the birth-rate. Reacting to what they view as restrictive and oppressive aspects of woman’s traditional role, some feminists have called for a flight from the family and the degrading tasks of home. Betty Friedan argued for a professional career over the “feminine mystique” of wife and mother, portraying the family as incidental to a woman’s life, and a reflection of her “mere biological” side. Only by escaping the “comfortable concentration camp” atmosphere of home, family and children, she argued, can women become “strong.” Kate Millet, a self-described radical lesbian feminist, attacked masculinity as Friedan did femininity. Men hate women, as women hate men. Millet sees the family, where “wives are slaves,” as an unredeemable, oppressive patriarchy which “must go.” In her thinking, procreation need not be associated with marriage, nor the raising of children with parents. In the Marxist nirvana, children will be raised by the state and the family abolished, “marriage . . . replaced by voluntary associations.” Germaine Greer sees

2. Aphraat, *Demonstration*, 18.1, cited in Peter Brown, “The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church,” *Christian Spirituality*, ed. McGinn (New York: Crossroad, 1986), vol. I, p. 427.

the plight of mothers as more desperate than that of other women . . . Most women, because of the assumptions that they have formed about the importance of their role as bearers and socializers of children, would shrink at the notion of leaving husband and children, but this is precisely the case in which brutally clear thinking must be undertaken.

The "unfortunate mother-wife," she adds, is a failure: to her husband, a shrew and a sexual bore, and to her children, far inferior to the communal parent; happily, however, she records, the dilemma is being resolved in the present dissolution of the family. Nancy Chodorow asserts that "non-biological mothers, children, and men can parent just as adequately as biological mothers," and she cites the glowing examples of Communist Russia, Maoist China and Castro Cuba. From "the fact that women mother," she argues, derive the neuroses of masculinity and femininity, which equally shared parenting could heal.³

Maggie Gallagher, young single professional mother and Yale graduate, tells a different story. In her recent *Enemies of Eros*, based upon her own misfortunes, she agrees that the modern woman is exploited: that she is more likely to have been raped on a date, more likely to be discarded by her husband, more likely to have to earn a second income to make ends meet (in addition to family responsibilities), more likely not to have been married at all; that boy-friends take up her early years, refuse to commit themselves, and then move on to more youthful partners. Having been told that women should be emotionally and economically independent and that personal growth must be pursued at any cost "til death do us part" has become, "til you bore me, 'til the burdens of parenting and monogamy become unbearable, 'til I need more space, 'til my secretary gives me a tumble."

In looking for the causes of the exploitation of women, Gallagher points the finger at a notion of sexual liberation which has "sanctioned selfishness in the name of freedom," and at no-fault divorce which has contributed to the number of children raised in semi-poverty. Principally, however, she faults the feminist myth that men and women are psychically the same. She suggests that feminism, without intending to, has contributed to the development of a society where it is open season on women, for, in an atmosphere as permissive as ours, it is the woman who suffers most.

Against those who argue that "female" characteristics are merely the result of "cultural determinism," and that "the sexes are inherently the same in everything save for the reproductive systems," all available data continue to suggest that the mother's relationship to the child is

3. B. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1982), pp. 37, 77; K. Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978), pp. 79, 87; G. Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), pp. 343, 364. Cf. N. Davidson, *The Failure of Feminism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1988) and M. Levin, *Feminism and Freedom* (New York: Transaction Books, 1987).

utterly different from, and incredibly more involved than, that of the father. The best proof, says Gallagher, is the fact that, despite all the efforts made in recent years to demean and discourage it, the mothering instinct is as strong as ever. Otherwise, why should women continue to bear children, despite the very real possibility of having to raise them alone under severe hardship?⁴

Of late, a decided change in feminist attitudes has been noticeable. The kibbutz of Israel, for example, long held up as a model of egalitarianism, has seen a return to traditional family models, with "children's houses" giving way to enlarged single family dwellings, and division of labor more along feminine-masculine lines. American women have been choosing to limit careers in favor of marriage and motherhood, and are less willing to hand their offspring over to surrogates. As vocational goals are achieved, or not achieved, as the attractions of short-term relationships dim and liaisons become less frequent, less fulfilling, or both, the desire for a child grows. Even among those who reject intimacy with men, there are some who are not averse to impregnation in order to mother children without a "father."

It seems reasonable to conclude, then, that, despite the upheavals in feminine roles which the twentieth century has witnessed, it is in the order of nature not only for women to give birth, but to want to give birth. It may be true that, for a considerable portion of human history, it seemed to be the only order of their nature. Nevertheless, it is around the biological fact of motherhood — the wonder of motherhood — that the meaning of woman is to be located: to conceive, to bear, to nurture, to offer a love which is richly returned, and one day, after one's children have matured and had offspring themselves, to claim those children as well, as grandchildren.

III

Biblical woman found this "natural" phenomenon sanctified and deepened. She lived in a world whose tradition gave as its first command to humankind, "*Be fruitful and multiply*" (Gen. 1:28), where, as in some Käthe Kolwitz drawing, it was the sublime image of "a weaned child upon its mother" (Ps. 131) which evoked utter faith and utter solace:

As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you . . . that you may suck from her breast and draw from her bosom consolation to the full . . . "You shall be carried on shoulders and dandled upon knees" (Is. 66:11-13); where the idyllic scene of the venerated man is one whose wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the heart of your house; your sons like olive saplings around your table. This is the blessing in store for the man who fears the Lord. May [you] . . . live to see your children's children! Peace be upon Israel! (Ps. 128).

4. See Don Feder, "Feminism Contributes to Woes," The Boston Herald, November 27, 1990, from which I have drawn in commenting on the Gallagher book.

The failure of the Bible to extend its prohibition against homosexuality to include woman is not to be equated — as some contemporary writers fantasize — with tacit permission. It was omitted because it was unthinkable, the image of woman as wife/mother being so central to the order of creation that it remained outside the limits of conceivable behavior. There is hardly a case recorded in the entire span of Biblical and Rabbinic literature. Indeed, to be able to have a child but decide against doing so was considered by the Sages to be akin to shedding the blood of the unborn. Childless love was thought to be incomplete, and giving birth, in the words of a contemporary, “the ability to transcend the self into another.”⁵ While it is true that the matriarchs lived much before the prophets and the psalmists who are here cited, this later tradition represents, in part, the explicit expression and institutionalization of previous patterns of behavior to which the lives of the matriarchs were central and by which they were, to some extent, confirmed.

To be barren as a woman is one thing, as a Hebrew another, but to be barren as a matriarch adds a further dimension. The first signifies natural order, the second Divine purpose, while the third suggests the assurance of the covenant. How so? The covenant that God made with Abraham promised blessing to all mankind through the people that would come from Abraham and Sarah. But without a child, to continue what Abraham and Sarah began, there could be no people, and without the people no blessing for mankind. It was the bearing of a successor-child that represented fulfillment of the matriarchal role.

Barrenness, however, is a characteristic of the matriarchs. Of Sarah it is written,

Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am (Genesis 18:13)? [Of Rebecca], Isaac pleaded with the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren (25:21). [And of Rachel], the Lord opened Leah's womb . . . but Rachel was barren (29:31).

Why this paradoxical infertility? To alert us to the precariousness of human birth and the preciousness of the child once born. So fragile was the chain of the covenant in those early years, that it might have broken had even one of the matriarchs remained childless. Barrenness, then, drove home the inestimable value of these children, with what care they must be raised, how vital that the right son inherit the birth-right, and how indispensable his marriage to a woman who would honor the covenant and wish to continue it — over all of which the matriarchs took great pains. Sometimes they acted with greater wisdom than did the patriarchs, as with Rebecca's choice, against Isaac's will, of Jacob over Esau for the birthright-blessing. Both the forces beyond and within their control — the reality of infertility and the nurturing of the child — are elements in the struggle for succession. Two of the matriarchs

5. Catherine Chaliel, *Les Matriarches: Sarah, Rebecca et Léa* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), p. 179.

are so obsessed with the need for a child that they offer their handmaids as substitutes to bear for them, despite all the problems inherent in that arrangement. When the children are born, it is the matriarchs who name and assume responsibility for them. And though these barren matriarchs were the favorites of husbands who never berated them for their state, they continue to berate themselves as incomplete, as fostering a kind of death within life.

Consequently, in the matriarchal families, where concern for succession is paramount, each child is cherished, for only through the child can the blessing of the one become the blessing for all. Something more is involved in these cases than womanly instinct. What other cultures may have expressed philosophically or legally, Scripture teaches by way of narrative. The generous amount of space devoted to the difficulties, both in bearing children and in their finding proper mates — the search for partners being fraught with as much danger as their birth — point to the same issue: handing down (*mesorah*) and accepting (*kabbalah*) the covenant. As if to say: “How precious the offspring that issue forth from these! Take them not for granted!” One might have expected that these first children of the covenant upon whom so much depended would be born miraculously, to a virgin or through a Divine kiss. Yet, though the Divine will is implied in each birth, they are conceived within the framework of mortal marital life. Nevertheless, these children will not be like other children. The details of their lives will be recorded in mankind’s most widely and constantly read book. They will play a role which can be played by no others, and upon the quality of their lives will depend not only the future of this marriage or that family or even the entire people, but of all humankind.

IV

Rachel

It is against this background of motherhood and matriarchy that Rachel’s barrenness must be considered. Hers, however, is a special case. There is no other love story among the matriarchs, or in the entire Bible for that matter, such as Rachel’s. No other matriarch must contend with the pervading presence of a Leah, who is neither handmaiden nor, worse, second wife, but a first wife, a sister, and, exceptional among the matriarchs, a bountiful mother of sons. (As will be developed later, Leah’s fertility is one of the characteristics which set her apart from the matriarchs.) Neither beauty nor love seem to suffice. Rachel was no more comforted for her barrenness by the love of Jacob than her counterpart, Hannah (later the mother of the prophet Samuel) was by her husband’s assurance — “Why are you crying and why do you eat nothing? Am I not more devoted to you than ten sons?” (Sam. 1:5).

Rachel wants to be not only a wife, but a mother. Turning to love-potions, driven to jealousy, and accusing her husband, she feels unfulfilled on all three levels — as a woman, a Hebrew, and a matriarch.

The Bible [writes Chalker] cannot conceive of the fullness of love without lineage. The severity of the rabbis on this point, in which they identify sterility with death, finds its roots in the history of the matriarchs, and in their struggle, often dogged and anguished, against such a fate, against the ravages of a temporality of decline, without the possibility of self-transcendence through posterity.

Thus, for Rachel, the unbearable proximity of death and barrenness, indeed, of their inseparability, renders null and void love's fullness all the while that fecundity — that by which transcendence of self takes place — is denied. It is as if by missing this passage to the other-than-onself, which is childbirth, love could only have eyes for the terrible menace of death, could only perceive the truth of its inevitable mortality, of its incapacity to struggle with the force of this finite destiny. Indeed, Rachel, the beloved, braves the derision of those who, on the frontiers of indecency, wait for manifest proof of justice — for does not the devil of sterility reveal some secret iniquity? A further burden to Rachel's suffering is her confrontation with the envy she feels. Her generosity in giving up her place to Leah is hardly repaid. Rivalry, wrong when it was a question of marriage, with its hope for happiness, now confounds her magnanimity, and, faced with her sister's pregnancies, mortifies her.⁶

Rachel seeks a child not only to transcend the self, the yearning of every woman, but to continue the covenant, the unique role of the matriarch. Despairing, she complains of Jacob, "Give me children, else I die." Jacob, who has fathered children with Leah, denies responsibility and responds harshly, "Can I take the place of God who has denied you fruit of the womb?" (30:1-2). Demeaned, Rachel sacrifices her pride and brings him her maidservant "that she bear upon my knees and I also may be builded up through her" (30:3). As with Sarah and Hagar before her, Bilhah will bear children in Rachel's behalf. She names and adopts the two boys; they will be hers though borne by another — Scripture's surrogate mother. Not to be outdone, Leah, who had stopped bearing, brings Jacob her handmaid, who bears two to counter Bilhah's two sons. Determined to pursue the avenue of fecundity to the end, Leah bears yet another son after the discovery of the mandrake elixir, and finally a daughter, Dinah. Rachel still hopes for a child of her own, without which she would not have fulfilled her role as a wife nor as a matriarch.

At last —

God remembered Rachel and opened her womb, and she conceived and bore a son . . . and called his name Joseph, which is to say, "May the Lord add (Heb. YSF) another son for me (21,22).

The climax to the tension of the tale is over too quickly for the Sages, who, not satisfied with the brief Scriptural report of this mo-

6. Ibid., pp. 179-80.

mentous birth, add tales as to how it came about. Rachel, they say, was granted a child by virtue of her compassion for her sister, whom she herself helped disguise in order that Leah not be discovered by Jacob on their wedding night. Leah, they add, joined by Bilhah and Zilpah, assisted Rachel in her supplications for a child.

Petitions for the childless are commonplace in the Bible. While Scripture says that "Isaac pleaded with the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren" (Gen. 25:21), the sages insist that Rebecca prayed as well.⁷ Well-known is the prayer of Hannah, who went up to the house of the Lord in Shiloh each year, that she might have a child.

In her wretchedness, she prayed to the Lord, weeping all the while. And she made this vow: "O Lord of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and . . . grant me a male child, I will dedicate him to the Lord for all the days of his life (I Sam. 1:11).

Both Isaac's and Hannah's prayers were answered, with the birth of Jacob and Samuel.

The most moving exposition on Rachel's prayer, however, is found in a little known medieval poem from the Rosh Hashanah (New Year) liturgy. With the new cycle of the calendar year comes the hope of human renewal. Birth and rebirth are recurrent themes. On the first day of the holiday, the Scriptural readings record the birth of Isaac to Sarah in her old age and the birth of Samuel to Hannah. Further, these children are said to have been conceived on Rosh Hashanah, as was Joseph. These births signalled the renewal of creation, which the holiday celebrated, in their guarantee of the covenant on whose moral law the world rested. Thus, human birth pointed to the spiritual rebirth for the people and the individual.

Within the liturgy for the New Year there are three Hebrew poems by Kalir (570-630), taken from a larger composition dealing with each of the patriarchs and matriarchs. Typical of the style of the time, they are written in a fashion so crammed with wordplay, allusions, and midrashim, as well as the poet's own insights, as to require a highly sophisticated audience or a commentary. The poet takes up the theme of the barrenness of the matriarchs, and asks that the merit by virtue of which they were granted children be enlisted in behalf of the needs of the people of Israel at the season of the birth of the New Year.

The section on Rachel, however, differs from the others. While the merits of Sarah and Rebecca are associated with those of their husbands, Abraham and Isaac, Rachel is treated alone in her quest for a child. There is no mention at all of Jacob. Not averse to making his own contribution, the poet draws upon a variety of midrashic and Bib-

7. *Genesis Rabbah* 63.

lical sources: the provocation of Leah's sons; the merit of Rachel's silence on [what should have been] her wedding night; the miraculous switching of the sisters' embryos, in response to Rachel's prayers rather than those of Leah, as another version has it; and the bestowal of matriarchy on Rachel only as a result of Joseph's birth; while Jeremiah's picture of Rachel rising from her grave "weeping for her children who are not" (that is, the exiles) is transmuted into Rachel's weeping that she might have children of her own!

The switching of the embryos and the achieving of the matriarchy require further elucidation. According to rabbinic legend, Leah was pregnant with a boy and Rachel with a girl. But the number of sons to be born to Jacob had been fixed at twelve: were Leah to give birth to a boy, Rachel could have borne only one son thereafter, eleven having already been born: Leah's 7 + Bilhah's 2 + Zilpah's 2 = 11. But if Rachel had only one son, she would not have been worthy of the matriarchy, since she would have born fewer sons than even the handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah. Thus, the fervor of Rachel's prayer, miraculously granted, that the embryos be switched — giving her a son, Joseph, and Leah a daughter, Dinah — and the hope that the merit of that prayer might redound to the entire people-Israel each Rosh Hashanah.

[Confronted by the four sons of Leah,]
 Rachel weeps for children of her own.
 "Dry your tears," the Lord bids her
 — mindful of her kindness to her sister
 on her wedding night —
 "For you shall yet bear sons."
 Then did the Master Potter,
 By Whose hands all life is shaped,
 Take the female embryo within Rachel
 And set it into Leah,
 And the male embryo within Leah
 He set into Rachel.
 For they were already pregnant.
 Thus did Leah bear Dinah, and Rachel [bear] Joseph.
 And she who had been as a stranger in her own home,
 While childless,
 Now became the center of Jacob's family,
 And could be numbered among the matriarchs.

On this Day of Remembrance
 Rachel stands and pleads for her descendants.
 As she was remembered,
 So too may they be remembered.⁸

Some 1400 years after Kalir's widely used but enigmatic poem, another quite modern one was composed on a similar theme — this, by

8. A free translation. For a full discussion of the sources of the text, see D. Goldschmidt, ed., *High Holiday Prayerbook for Rosh Hashanah* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 69-70.

the twentieth-century Yiddish writer, Kadya Molodowsky. She was, of course, not the first to treat Kalir's motif of the matriarchs, a motif which appears with great frequency in the Yiddish *teḥine* literature written by, and for, women in Central and Eastern Europe over the past several centuries. Included in Molodowsky's collection, entitled *Froyen-Lider* ("Women's Songs"), is a poem on the matriarchs, marriage and motherhood, with which Rachel is identified.

For poor brides who were servant girls,
 Mother Sarah draws forth from dim barrels
 pitchers of sparkling wine ...
 And for street walkers
 Dreaming of white wedding shoes
 ... clear honey ...

For high-born brides, now poor,
 Who blush to bring patched wash
 Before their mothers-in-law,
 Mother Rebecca leads camels laden with white linen ...

For those whose eyes are tired
 From watching the neighbors' children
 And whose hands are thin from yearning
 To hold a soft small body
 And to rock its cradle,
 Mother Rachel brings healing [mandrake] leaves
 Discovered on distant mountains,
 And comforts them with a quiet word:
 At any hour God may open the sealed womb!⁹

9. K. Hellerstein, "Kadya Molodowsky's 'Froyen-Lider,'" *AJS Review* XIII, 1&2 (1988): 66. I have made slight changes in Hellerstein's translation.

Ben Zoma's Paradoxes

LOUIS FINKELSTEIN

IN MISHNAH ABOT D. RABBI NATHAN 4.1

we read the following teaching of Ben Zoma:

Who is wise? He that learns from all men, as it is written, "From all of my teachers have I got understanding." (Ps. 119:99). Who is mighty? "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." (Proverbs 16.32) Who is rich? He that rejoices in his portion, as it is written, "When thou eatest the labour of thy hands happy shalt thou be — in this world; and it shall be well with thee — in the world to come. Who is honoured? He that honours mankind, as it is written, "For them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." (Is 2:30)

The Commentators generally associate Ben Zoma's remarks with the verse in Jeremiah, 9:22, which reads:

"Thus said the Lord:

Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom;
Let not the strong man glory in his strength;
Let not the rich man glory in his riches
But only in this should one glory:
In his earnest devotion to Me
For I the Lord act with Kindness, Justice, and Equity in the world;
For in those I delight — declares the Lord.

However, this association seems unlikely because the Prophet considers people who take pride in their wisdom, strength or wealth as foolish. Ben Zoma suggests that such individuals do not know what really constitutes wisdom, strength and wealth. Moreover, Ben Zoma mentions four qualities; Jeremiah speaks of only three. Others associates Ben Zoma's statement with paradoxes which sophists and philosophers delighted to formulate.¹

It seems more likely that what Ben Zoma had in mind was the dictum of the school of Shammai that, "One should teach only him who is talented and meek and of distinguished ancestry and rich." Ben

1. In a summer session, with a number of Rabbis, Professor Saul Lieberman taught Mishnah *Abot*. Professor Richard McKeon was present at these sessions. When he heard Professor Lieberman discussing Ben Zoma's sayings, Professor McKeon said, "These are paradoxes."

It is conceivable that Ben Zoma, who was one of four sages who entered the "Pardes," and studied metaphysics and philosophy, (*Hagigah* 14b) was thinking of Socrates.

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Zoma was a follower of the school of Hillel, which held that "One ought to teach every man."² His paradoxes identify the qualities which betoken the promising scholar, namely: the ability and readiness to learn from everyone; control of one's passions; contentment with one's lot; respect for his fellow man.

It seems that Rabbi Eliezer, adhering strongly to the Shammaitic view, had refused to teach Rabbi Akiba, a contemporary of Ben Zoma, and Rabbi Akiba made his way to Jewish learning by studying under Rabbi Tarfon. Hence, in the famous debate about whether one is permitted to work on the Sabbath as part of the Temple Ritual, the Hillelites maintained that if it could have been done before the Sabbath, it must not be done on the Sabbath. The Shammaites said that it could be done on the Sabbath. When Rabbi Akiba, adhering to the Hillelite position, defeated Rabbi Eliezer in the debate, Rabbi Joshua said, quoting Judges, "Behold the people whom thou didst despise, go out, I pray thee, and make war against them!" (Judges 9:38).³ The Shammaitic view of teaching was accepted by Rabban Gamaliel II, although he was a descendant of Hillel. On the subject of disciples, (he) spoke of four kinds:

An unclean fish, a clean fish, a fish from the Jordan, and a fish from the Great Sea.

An unclean fish: who is that? A poor youth who studies Scripture and Mishnah, Halakhah and Aggadah and is without understanding.

A clean fish: who is that? That is a rich youth who studies Scripture and Mishnah, Halakhah and Aggadah, and has understanding.

A fish from the Jordan: who is that? That is a scholar who studies Scripture and Mishnah, Midrash, Halakhah, and Aggadah, and is without the talent for give and take.

A fish from the Great Sea: who is that? That is a scholar who studies Scripture and Mishnah, Midrash, Halakhah and Aggadah, and has the talent for give and take.⁴

Ben Zoma, who was among the most distinguished of the sages in the first half of the second century, was neither rich, nor of distinguished ancestry. We have good reason to believe that he was in control of his passions. That he was satisfied with his lot is recorded in a Talmudic passage which states that when he saw a crowd on the Temple Mount, he said, "Blessed be he who created all these people to serve me; how much work Adam had to do before he could eat a piece of bread. He had to plow the ground, plant the seeds, harvest the grain, grind it, sift the flour, make the dough and bake it. Whereas I wake up in the morning, and there everything is ready for me."⁵

2. J. Goldin, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*, p. 26.

3. Louis Finkelstein, *Akiba, Scholar, Saint and Martyr*, p. 93.

4. Goldin, *Op. cit.*, p. 166.

The haunting question is, whether he did not become a victim of his dictum regarding the virtue of learning from everyone? Did he include the Gnostics, whom he later joined? And was that the reason why he left his colleagues and teachers who were convinced that he had lost his mind? It is recorded that when meeting Rabbi Joshua, Ben Zoma not only failed to greet him, but did not reply to his teacher's greeting. Only when Rabbi Joshua insisted that Ben Zoma tell him what distracted him and prevented him from common courtesy did Ben Zoma reply, "I have been thinking of the Creation and the tiny distance between the upper waters (beyond the sky) and the lower waters on the Earth." This seemed to Rabbi Joshua such a waste of time that he naturally felt that Ben Zoma was mentally disoriented.⁶

5. *Berakhkot* 58a.

6. *Hagigah* 15a.

In Defense of Balak: Not Entirely Midrash

JUDAH GOLDIN

BALAK, THE SON OF ZIPPOR, WAS ONCE THE king of Moab. In Scripture, he has not received a good press,¹ as they say. Even about four hundred years after his reign, he was still recalled with lack of charity.² Why? Because, in dread of the Israelites, he strove to drive them away from the borders of his country. He applied to the Midianites for help. The latter advised divinations, and even recommended a highly skilled practitioner of the profession, namely, Balaam of Pethor. His fees might be high, but Balak was prepared to meet them, and, if necessary, indeed, offer even higher. Balaam finally accepted the assignment; it's difficult to turn down big profits. Several times he tried his best, for, in addition to income, his reputation was at stake. But he failed, and, in the end, was ignominiously dismissed. However, one farewell bit of advice that he offered to Balak did prove useful, and, as a result, 24,000 Israelites perished.³ Little wonder that the Biblical narrators have no good word for Balak, and even less for Balaam, of course, whose professional pride plus fake humility (a commonplace among loudmouths who seek public applause) — "I cannot say anything other than what God puts into my mouth" — had to be punctured. He failed to behold an angel whom even his ass recognized. Whether Balak's eyesight was superior or inferior is nowhere reported. A successor of his in the ninth century BCE, Mesha, could boast of triumph and, in self praise, said as much on a stone monument, which was lost sight of until the middle of the nineteenth century of our era.⁴ However, this is immaterial, for no angel blocked Balak's progress.

The villain of our piece is Balaam, as everyone knows. This sentence might appear superfluous, save that, in our course towards understanding, it clears away the obstacles.

First, that Balak should seek help to destroy Israel was natural and justified. Should not a king do all he can do to protect his country? What would you think of a prime minister who did nothing as he expected an enemy invasion? A blockade? Remember the Maginot Line! Here were the Israelites finally encamped at the steppes of Moab, across

1. For the story of Balak and Balaam, see Num. 22:2-24:25.

2. Micah 6:5.

3. Numbers 25:9; and on Balaam's counsel see Numbers 31:16 and B. *Sanhedrin* 106a.

4. On the Mesha stone, cf. *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, III, 419-420, s.v. "Moabite Stone."

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the Jordan from Jericho. Moab had good reason to be alarmed by the steady advance of the Israelites after their conquest of the Amorites. Possibly, the Moabite troops were fewer than those of the invaders. Balak dreaded their superior tactics. Without Midianite support, he knew that he was no match for their forces. Israel's earlier victories proved that they had in their possession some secret weapon, more than the customary military hardware. To counteract that, only the famous man from Pethor could be effective, so Balak rightly sent for him. Expense, admission to the notorious Midianites of self-insufficiency at this point, were not active restraints; he was left with no alternatives.

The message was frank, free of the usual diplomatic international duplicity: "Here is a people come out of Egypt and settled next to me. Come and put a curse on them, for they lick clean all of their surroundings like oxen that lick up every blade of grass in the fields." Disgusting, as Rabbi Akiba said later.⁵ "With your help, perhaps I can defeat them and drive them off. Today it's us, tomorrow it will be you. It's not too long a distance from Moab to Midian.⁶ And I know that him you bless is blessed, indeed, and him you curse is cursed."

A king who cares for his country and refuses to depend only on his own, presumably reputable, curse-mongers surely deserves credit.

Second, Balak, to save his people, ignores his own legitimate eminence — he is, after all, a king! — and willingly acts the role of Balaam's menial. Balaam orders, "Build for me seven altars, get me seven bulls and seven rams," and Balak carries out the orders without protest. Who normally issues orders, the king or the hired hand? The invocations fail, Scripture informs us, and Balaam apologizes.

Balak, however, is not without initiative; he leads Balaam from location to location: Try it from this height, try it from another, try it from still one other. But all positions are in vain. Instead of cursing, Balaam blesses the enemy. In exasperation and with discourtesy, Balak orders his expulsion, and, apparently, without any honorarium. The king does not squander his country's treasures, and Balaam is exposed as a charlatan.

Third, consider Balaam, a poetic genius. You have said nothing clear when you try to emphasize that his speeches were what God put in his mouth. All inspiration is supernatural. So are Mozart's Four Quartets for Flute & Strings. From somewhere beyond reach come together combinations of words or colors or musical sounds that did not exist, with just that innovative intensiveness that they did not possess earlier, even if the single phonemes or notes were available, and they proclaim: Genius — precisely what Balaam was. The line between charlatan and genius is often unclear: God spoke to this heathen directly, in the idiom

5. *Mekilta Be-Shallah* 7 (ed. Lauterbach, I, 249).

6. Cf. Genesis 36:5.

that He otherwise vouchsafed to His prophets: "There is a people that dwells apart / Not reckoned among the nations . . . The Lord their God is with them / And their King's acclaim in their midst . . . How fair are your tents, O Jacob / Your dwellings, O Israel!" It is as though grossly (may his memory forgive me if it can) I were to turn upside down Gerard Manley Hopkins' lines, to say: "Wert thou my friend, O thou my enemy, / How wouldst thou better, I wonder, than thou dost / win, uplift me? (The original is breathtaking.)

How clever of the Jews to appropriate the verse "How fair . . . your tents" for recital on entrance into the synagogue. Hear, O Israel, what the gentiles say when the holy spirit overtakes them. Who needs an anti-defamation machinery?

Balaam's eloquence was so abundant, it overflowed even to his ass. Miracle, no doubt. Howbeit, never underestimate miracles; they are a public insurgence of the unanticipated. What is even more astonishing is that Balaam missed his cue — he, the richly gifted one. He did not recognize an angel while his beast could, and did not appreciate that it was best to stay home; for the permission to go on was grudging, and it is wisest not to display one's limitations, though a genius. But geniuses, too, are victims of lapses of judgment. Would Balak still have invited him, had he known of the episode? There are neither hints nor guesses in the book of Numbers, although this may be another example of Biblical satire directed against whatever or whomever Israel dislikes. Balak put his trust in a stargazing agent,⁷ but this is neither disreputable nor unique in royal courts, or on thrones, or among first ladies with access to the ear of chief executives. He did his best for his country, and although he did not get what he wanted, he acted patriotically. That was insufficient. Therefore, as a parting shot, Balaam advised him how to inflict injury on Israel, and 24,000 of them fell victim.⁸ Their God cannot stand fornication. So set up whorehouses for them. It is common knowledge that Israelites keep their distance from their menstruating wives; but that is no guarantee of their marital fidelity.⁹ (All hail to the candor of the Midrash!)

Despite his disappointment with Balaam, and for lack of better counsel from his own ministers of defense, Balak followed the advice of the Pethorite. He developed a red light district, and in front of each entrance stationed an elderly madam with merchandise for sale. When an Israelite approached to make a purchase, the old woman would suggest, "Go indoors, it's cheaper there." Here he would find a beautiful, even princessly, girl, who first offered him strong wine — for, at this

7. Perhaps this lies behind the expression of Numbers 24:3, *shetum ha'ayin*. See also 24:4, 24:16.

8. Cf. B. *Sanhedrin* 106a.

9. See *Sifre Numbers* 8 (ed. Horovitz), p. 13.

period, the wine of the gentiles was still kosher.¹⁰ He would have a drink; then another, a third and a fourth would be pressed on him, until he got drunk. Once intoxicated by the liquor and the girl's good looks, he yielded, as we might guess; and even worse.

The strategy was brilliant: elderly women in front of the house, and high society prostitutes inside. It once almost happened to me in Munich, a clean and pornographic city. Whenever I traveled in Europe, in connection with research, no sooner had I found lodgings, even before heading impatiently for the manuscript and rare books library, than I went out in search of a laundry to make sure that I had enough clean shirts and underwear for the week. The laundries were not always easy to find. I would try neutral looking shops when I saw no laundry sign. And in Munich, especially in the sixties, near Sonnestrasse, I went from street to street with my dirty wash and no one either could, or would, inform me of the whereabouts of a *Waschanstalt*. On Frauenstrasse (this is not a pseudonym) I detected a storefront with nothing in the show-window but an artificial red rose in a milk bottle, and an elderly woman with cherry-red cheeks at the doorway, slightly ajar. I was too tired to think of anything but a laundry at this hour of the afternoon. There must be one somewhere; maybe this was it. I approached the women: "*Ist hier eine Wäsche?*" She seized my free wrist with a Zoe-like talon and began to pull me indoors, saying in English, "Beautiful girls inside, young, not expensive." I wrenched my hand away violently and fled, dazed. How stupid of me, like Balaam on his ass, not to see what the storefront advertised. After running frantically for two more blocks, I located a laundry, and, walking back to Sonnenstrasse on a block parallel to Frauenstrasse, I recalled the midrash.

600,000 minus 24,000 still left the Israelites with a large army of 576,000. Nevertheless, twenty-four thousand is a large number of casualties. The Israelites did not forget the treachery of the Midianites. The naked sword put an end to Balaam.¹¹

Thereafter, relations with the Moabites — with the Midianites, too — fluctuated with the changing international spasms, sometimes neutral, sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile. With whom did the Israelites ever get along for long? For that matter, with whom did Moabites get along, or Amorites, Edomites, Midianites, Philistines, Assyrians, and later kingdoms and empires? Each people edits its own annals, and broadcasts its own superiorities. "Israel having completely perished forever," Mesha boasted.¹² We are not here attempting an outline of history. Only two ironies and some effort at fairness are on our mind.

First, after the Balak-Balaam affair, an Israelite campaign ensued against the Midianites that was devastating; Moses lost his temper and,

10. B. *Sanhedrin*, 106a.

11. Numbers 31:8.

12. Moabite Stone, line 7.

as a result, forgot what he had to say,¹³ which was that Israel was not sufficiently vindictive! And, yet, it was the daughter of a Midianite priest whom he himself had married.¹⁴ What is more, it was from his Midianite father-in-law that Moses learned to create a civilized judicial system¹⁵ — Moses, who never took orders except from God. Moses might occasionally acquiesce to reasonable disagreement with his view.¹⁶ He might complain sometimes,¹⁷ but he knew how to come to the defense of his backsliding coreligionists.¹⁸ However, for established institutions he listened only to the One God. The vindictiveness against the Midianites seems excessive, even though the Bible finds it pragmatic. Moses himself came to no disaster for marrying a Midianite woman. Of course, that was long before, but, whatever comes out in the open later, it leaves ground for suspicion that resentment of some sort, though unjust, was earlier and secretly, unwittingly perhaps, suppressed. I knew that before I had ever read Freud or Jung and their descendants.

At all events, the curses that Balak hoped would help him were transformed into extremely laudatory praises of Israel.

Second, although he had no prophetic inkling of it, Balak's descendant, Ruth, married into the family that would boast of no less an offspring than King David, and the royal line that was, in turn, to set the seal of redemption on those whom Balak had expected to destroy. He failed, and it is not unjust to say that one of his offspring proved a blessing to Israel.

Had it been possible for him to foresee this, it would not have comforted him. He knew his immediate obligation to protect his people from invaders who had to be repelled by more than ordinary weapons. That is why he was ready to reward Balaam handsomely. He was neither the first nor the last to be let down by a trusted ally. That in seeking help he was prepared to go to extremes, was that to his discredit? The Hebrew chronicler implies that it was, but that is partisan reporting.

To paraphrase a leading classical historian in his notes on the Greek Book of Esther, "The Greek author," [he is referring to a certain Lysimachus of Jerusalem] "always gave the other side a hearing . . . It is a pity that modern Jewish historiography has lost this Hellenic feature of presenting the Hamanic opinion exactly and with understanding."¹⁹ This has nothing to do with the Balak story, true. But that composition is also narrative posing as history, and is instructive for our purpose. Is the criticism only of "modern historiography?" Mimicry may well

13. Cf. *Abot de-Rabbi Natan* (ed. Schechter), Version A, p. 3.

14. Exodus 2:21.

15. Exodus 18:19-26.

16. Leviticus 10:16-20.

17. Numbers 11:11-12.

18. Exodus 32:11 ff.

19. E. Bickerman, *Studies in Jewish and Christian History* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), I, p. 263.

be a venerable continuity with the past, or tribute to it, along with sad submission and resignation because we can't do better. What W.H. Auden said about *The Book of Common Prayer*²⁰ should serve as a warning to all who use English for expression; it won't poison modern Jews, either, in their use of Hebrew or its English translation. A Language is a solemn component of history, antique or up-to-date. And those contemporary historians who break with the past, don't even know "the other side" to overhear it, despite espionage, let alone their own side when it speaks up. They substitute their own tabloid accounts for what neither was past nor is present. Simply sensationalism.

20. *A Certain World* (New York: Viking, 1970), p. 226.

Sacred Texts in Sacred Context: Images of My Grandfather

DANIEL H. GORDIS

THE OCCASION OF A *FESTSCHRIFT* IN MY grandfather's honor evokes a host of complicated emotions. Foremost among them, of course, are an abiding pride in his life's accomplishments coupled with deep gratitude for having been the beneficiary of his learning and love for more than three decades. But, along with these feelings, arises an abiding sadness about his illness, which has robbed him of the ability to engage in those intellectual and spiritual enterprises which he has always loved to pursue and to share.

I know that, if he could choose, my grandfather would have told me to submit, if anything, a standard academic paper for this *Festschrift*, without discussing him or his accomplishments. But other admirers and colleagues have contributed such papers; I have chosen to utilize this opportunity to share some perceptions of my grandfather which may give some sense of the singular role that he has played in my life.

Because he had always (prior to his illness) insisted on beginning our conversations, however brief or lengthy, with the study of some text, it seems most appropriate to weave these thoughts around a well known passage to which he introduced me in my early teens.

The context of that introduction was a discussion of the "cosmic" significance of simple human honesty. My grandfather quoted for me Rava's celebrated statement (at the bottom of *Shabbat* 31a) that when we are called to account for our use of our lives, the first question we shall be asked is whether we dealt honestly with others. With time, of course, I understood that the passage is infinitely more complex; it is, in essence, a statement of the ideals of a Jewish life well spent. Of late, I have come to see it as an apt description of the life that my grandfather has led.

The text itself is misleadingly simple:

Rava said: "When one is brought in judgment [before the heavenly court], they say to him: 'Have you dealt honestly, have you fixed regular times for [the study of] Torah, have you engaged in [the commandment to] 'be fruitful and multiply,' have you awaited redemption, have you searched after wisdom, have you learned one thing from another?'"

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Emunah: Honesty and Faith

Although I was first introduced to Rava's catalog of questions in a conversation about honesty, a narrow focus on what might be called "business ethics" misses one of the phrase's subtle suggestions. *Emunah*, the Hebrew word employed here for honesty, can also mean faith. One of my most abiding senses of my grandfather and his interactions with others is captured by this phrase; but it is faith, not just honesty, that makes him unique. To say that a person acts honestly sounds today almost trite; but to find someone who approaches each interaction with a belief in the essential goodness of the other person is rare, indeed.

Part of what has long motivated my grandfather's profound liberal inclination, a world view of which he is proud and in which he has never wavered, has been his essential belief in the intrinsic decency of others. Indeed, I cannot recall a single instance in which he seemed angry at another person. When letters assailing his positions were sent to his home, he asked me to read them to see if I agreed. Once, when a particularly nasty and unprovoked *ad hominem* missive arrived, he showed it to me in a combination of disbelief and amazement, but certainly not anger. Because his own feelings are so deeply rooted in kindness, he has always assumed that that same is true of others. Honest? Obviously. But more important to me has been his passionate commitment to the notion that, simply by virtue of being, each of us has worth and deserves to be heard.

Torah in the Broadest Sense

Three of Rava's questions ask about study. First he asks us to recognize the importance of regular study; he then reminds us to search for wisdom; and, finally, he tells us to derive one thing from another. No one else in my life has modeled regular and consistent study more than my grandfather. In college and rabbinical school, when I was living in Manhattan, even a five minute visit on the way to some other appointment inevitably began with a "Come, look at this quickly." His favorite text for these brief interludes has always been Epstein's *Torah Temimah*. In retrospect, I suspect that it served the purpose of accommodating his love for Biblical texts and my interests in rabbinic works at the same time.

But anything longer than a five minute visit always involved more than the *Torah Temimah*. Eating at his apartment meant participating in an additional ritual before beginning a meal. Books, journals, articles, notes and the like all had to be piled up and removed from the dining room table before it could be set. I cannot recall a meal which did not require this preliminary ceremony.

Even when I was in rabbinical school, a period in which one could not avoid study even if one were so inclined, my grandfather suspected

that I did not study enough. In a graduate school version of “What did you learn in school today?” he took an active and suspicious interest in what it was I thought I was learning. If he concluded that I wasn’t actually absorbing the material, there was no avoiding the lesson that would inevitably follow. Books would be pulled off shelves, I would be made to read aloud, and he would begin to teach. I cannot say that I looked forward to each such impromptu lesson, but, even then, I was astounded not only by his perseverance and intensity, but by his ability to add something significant and thoughtful to any subject that was raised.

Despite the widely acknowledged depth of his scholarship, my grandfather has always been more concerned with the relevance of his work. Perhaps it does not require taking too much liberty with Rava’s remarks to suggest that, as my grandfather has “sought after wisdom,” he has understood wisdom to be learning that made a difference in the way people saw the world. Countless times he told me, “There is nothing wrong with scholarly articles. But if the issues that you’re exploring don’t mean anything to real people, the work is useless.” Those were “fighting words,” to be sure, but he meant them.

To him, his popular works on Ecclesiastes, Job and Jewish theology, among others, were not diversions from his scholarly career. They were his ultimate *raison d’être*. If his books did not ultimately make classical texts more meaningful to thoughtful lay people, Jewish and non-Jewish, he felt that his scholarly advancements were devoid of meaning. JUDAISM magazine itself is a product of his sense of the crucial relationship between “wisdom” and “relevance.”

I recall once showing him an article before submitting it for review and publication. When we discussed it a few days later, he made a number of suggestions, most of which I probably incorporated, but have since forgotten. One I will remember always. He said, “It has too many footnotes. Large numbers of footnotes don’t mean anything. Think of something important to say, and say it. People won’t remember the article because it has dozens of notes.” I ended up submitting the article with all the footnotes intact, but, in the ensuing years, I’ve found it virtually impossible to hit the footnote key on the word processor without at least fleetingly remembering, and smiling, at his exhortation.

Rashi, on *Shabbat* 31a, explains Rava’s “Did you derive one thing from another” as referring to the use of human reason. That the use of reason has been a central tenet of my grandfather’s life goes without saying. But a conscious misinterpretation of Rava will permit mention of yet another characteristic of my grandfather’s intellectual life, namely, the seamlessness of his application of all aspects of secular and Jewish learning to each other.

I have never met anyone with his general breadth of knowledge. His shelves are filled not only with Jewish works, classic and modern,

but with general literature, works on music, art and politics. And, in his incomparable mind, each of these disciplines speaks to the other. While discussing a description of the natural world, in Job, for example, my grandfather would almost inevitably refer to some work of music that evoked for him a similar image. During my college years, our visits to Manhattan museums left me astounded not only by the sheer breadth of his knowledge and interest, but also by the way in which he could synthesize issues of Jewish theology and Renaissance painting in the same breath and thought.

While it is possible that Rava had only Jewish learning in mind when urging us to “understand one thing from another,” my grandfather would simply respond that if appreciation of the Godly in our world is a central tenet of Jewish life, then literature, art, music and other acts of the intellect are no less relevant than more immediately obvious subjects. Good teachers transmit an appreciation of a discipline, and sometimes even teach us how to think. Great teachers, I’ve long felt, help us re-define what it is that we ought to know. In that respect, my grandfather ranks among my greatest teachers.

Commitment to the Future

Though Rava’s comments about the importance of raising children and awaiting redemption are, on a literal level, unrelated, they share a concern with the future. One involves contributing to another generation which can build and witness that future, while the second pertains to belief in what that future holds.

For my grandfather, the Talmud’s claim (*Yevamot* 62b) that “the sons of sons are considered sons” carries more weight than many such aphorisms. His seven grandchildren are as different from one another as one could imagine. Some of our decisions have brought him joy; others prompted strong disagreement, maybe even disappointment. But while he experienced the trials and tribulations of watching his grandchildren grow into adulthood, I believe that each of us has had the luxury of knowing that his love for us, like the love which the tradition attributes to David and Jonathan (cf. *Avot* 5:16), was wholly unconditional.

Love, for him, has never meant automatic approval. My brothers and I know that, in some significant fashions, he is among our harshest critics. But his criticism stems from his high standards, and has always been softened by our knowledge that, regardless of how we responded, his continued love was guaranteed. In that sense, his role has taken on some of the qualities of a parent, beyond those commonly associated with grandparents. Now that his interactions with us have become so constrained, we have just begun to appreciate fully the blessing of that parental interest.

But among all of his traits, the one that I most admire is my grandfather's heart-felt belief that the world is an ever-improving place. He has never been naive or pollyanna-ish; he simply manages to see the potential good in virtually all changes, and has always stuck to his faith that human beings, in concert with God, could redeem our world. I suspect, in fact, that he believes not only that we can, but that we will.

In recall that in college, as I read his books and articles that dealt with theodicy ("evil in God's world," as he referred to it), the positions he assumed seemed to me incomplete, unsatisfactory. They didn't seem to express the rage that I could not help but feel as I looked around the world. At first, I assumed some careless thinking on his part, though I surely should have known better. As the years have gone by, I've come to appreciate that he and I simply see the world through different eyes. Where I tend to see cause for outrage, he sees opportunity for repair; where I sense a God who fails to answer, he speaks of a God waiting to be sought. Whether or not I shall ever achieve his degree of faith in the possibility of a redeemed world, I do not know. That the power of his confidence in human beings and God has forever changed the way I see the world, I have no doubt.

One of the great ironies of my grandfather's persona is that, while most of the world has tended to see him, partly because of his physical stature and partly due to his unparalleled oratorical skills, as a powerful personality, I have tended to see in him someone who needed protection. I never got beyond the feeling that someone with such faith in other people, and in the intrinsic goodness of the world, could intentionally or inadvertently be hurt at any turn.

Part of the sadness, for those of us who love him, is that the last few years of his life have seen that fear realized. He has always been a man who loved to participate in everything around him; now, that pleasure has been taken from him. The full nature of his tragic circumstances struck me once again just a few months ago, as I was describing to him my work on a doctoral dissertation. He absorbed every word and then, in a halting speech that belied his erstwhile oratorical skills, simply said, "How I wish I could read." I, too, wish for that. I find myself, periodically, stuck in a difficult text or mired in a thought that refuses to crystallize, and instinctively I almost reach for the phone to call him. And I am struck, in those awkward seconds, by both the magnitude of our collective loss as a result of his illness, and by the blessing that it has been to grow up "sitting in the dust of his feet" (*Avot* 1:4).

May God grant him the comfort and peace of mind that he so richly deserves.

Interreligious Dialogue: Lessons From My Father's House and Beyond

DAVID M. GORDIS

THE PUBLICATION OF THIS SPECIAL ISSUE of JUDAISM honoring my father, Robert Gordis, represents a particularly poignant occasion for our family. We are grateful to God for my father's presence with us, though deeply saddened by the knowledge that his catastrophic illness has robbed him of much of his remarkable intellectual capacity and ability to communicate. I know that he understands the honor that is being done him through this publication, and I know also that he is deeply moved by it though he is not able to express that gratitude.

I am personally appreciative of the invitation to participate in this publication. While the temptation was great to attempt to share with the reader the breadth of my father's influence on me, personally, intellectually and ideologically, I realized immediately that such an effort would be in vain, given the profundity and complexity of that influence. Instead, I offer this reflection on one area of his interest, commitment, and concern, namely, interreligious relationships. In this area, as in so many others, he has had a lasting impact on my own life and career and on my way of looking at the world. Let this serve as the "little which testifies to the abundant."

Among my earliest recollections of growing up as Robert Gordis's son, are those of his friendships with religious leaders of other faiths. My father was on friendly but essentially formal terms with Monsignor J. Jerome Reddy, the priest of St. Francis de Sales Roman Catholic Church in our community of Belle Harbor, New York. There was a traditional programmatic link with the First Congregational Church and its fine minister, Rev. Alan Richardson, and one of the earliest interreligious Thanksgiving services took place between our own Temple Beth El and First Congregational Church. The site of the service alternated each year, and the visiting clergyman always delivered the sermon. There was genuine warmth and enthusiasm in the service, and regular attendance at these services taught me something about America at its best, and set an example of pride in my Jewishness linked to respect for my Christian neighbors as people and interest in their views and tastes. These activities were extensions of my father's own convic-

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tions about how this country might work and how Jews should participate in American life and relate to other Americans. They left me with a legacy of pride, security, openness, and joy in the experience of America.

Perhaps most remarkable of these early recollections of interreligious relationships was our friendship with the Reverend W.L. Damian Pitcaithly, Pastor of the modest Protestant Episcopal Church of St. Andrews-by-the-Sea, the only Episcopal church in our beachfront community. At a time when such events were less common, the Pitcaithlys joined us for Seder and participated in the Hebrew readings, adding a delightful brogue to the Ashkenazic Hebrew of the rest of us. Pitcaithly was a solid scholar of the Hebrew Bible, and I still have in my library a leather bound Hebrew Book of Proverbs with his notes and diacritical comments, which he presented to me as a gift on one occasion. I recall discussions of Biblical grammar between my father and Pitcaithly, and have very warm feelings for the gentle, scholarly but puckish friend of our family who, with my father, modelled how Jews and those of other religious beliefs could mix religion, humanity and humor.

My father's interreligious interests went beyond the local and the informal. His friendships and involvements were wide and eclectic. He was, for many years, an active member of the Church Peace Union and the Council for Religion and International Affairs. He was quite close to the tragic figure of Bishop James Pike when they were together at Columbia University during the fifties, before Pike entered the period of difficulty and decline which sadly colors his memory for so many. When my father spent a year in Santa Barbara, California at Robert Hutchins' Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, he became quite friendly with Reinhold Niebuhr, whom he venerated. While I never met Niebuhr, my father's enormous admiration for his intellectual and moral courage made him a hero to me as well. Other major national figures to whom he felt very close included the Reverend Carl Heman Voss, whom I treasure as a friend to this day. My father took enormous pride and joy in his year of teaching Bible at the Union Theological Seminary, an institution which he loved and in which he felt very much at home. He introduced me to Union and particularly to its library and remarkable research staff who seemed to enjoy his frequent visits and assaults on their time. He was a devoted reader of *Commonweal* and the *Christian Century* as well as a variety of Christian learned journals.

My father inspired me to take an active interest in interreligious activity. I became involved in these concerns even before my ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary when I joined the theological students program of the Institute for Religious and Social Studies, an interreligious program which had been established by Dr. Louis Finkelstein and was directed by the late Jessica Feingold. In the years since

I entered Jewish public life I have been involved in a variety of interreligious activities, including the major programmatic involvements in this area of the American Jewish Committee, which I served as Executive Vice President from 1984 to 1987. In that capacity I participated in the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultation, which was a principal coordinating body for Jewish interreligious work, and had a variety of other interreligious involvements through the work of the Committee's Department of Interreligious Activities, headed ably by Rabbi A. James Rudin. My involvements in the world of interreligious activity both preceded and survived my days at the Committee. I have been involved in work in Bioethics at the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and continue to participate rather extensively in Catholic-Jewish programs. I had the privilege of participating as Jewish scholar-in-residence in a conference on "Human Dignity in Judaism and Christianity" which was held in Moscow in 1989. This was a particularly interesting experience because it was, apparently, the first public event of its kind in the "new" Soviet Union, and because it was understood by some of the Soviet participants as a conference of Jewish-Christians, of "Messianic Jews." Some delicate diplomatic efforts were required to correct the misimpression! I am currently involved in a program, based in Southern California, called the Academy for Jewish-Christian-Muslim Studies, directed by the Rev. Dr. George Grose, which fosters the study of the interrelationships among the three faiths, conducts tri-partite dialogues hosted by each of the three communities, and is currently at work on a volume of edited dialogue whose purpose is to prepare a written record of its work and extend its influence to a wider audience.

Having suggested schematically the extent of my continued involvement in interreligious activity, and indicating that my interest is part of my legacy from my father who, due to his infirmity, is, unfortunately, not able to articulate his own feelings on the subject, I must suggest a degree of frustration and even perplexity about the Jewish community and its interreligious involvement. Underlying my frustration is a concern about what we, as Jews, mean by dialogue and conversation. For conversation to take place constructively, each partner must want to hear what the other has to say, there must be a respect for the other in his or her "otherness," and there must be a commitment to the value of the enterprise in its mutuality. My father's work in this field was consistently characterized by these qualities. He was a serious student of other faiths. He studied the interplay of Judaism and Christianity, and he took Christianity and Christians seriously. He was convinced that the existence of parallel paths to God was a reflection of the Divine plan and was a source of enhancement for all people. He respected the insights of all faiths as he articulated with enormous commitment and pride the contributions of Jewish thought to religious history.

In contrast, my sense is that current Jewish involvement in inter-religious dialogue is motivated primarily by Jewish insecurity and is dominated by the need to achieve validation from others while conceding little, if any, validity to other faiths and traditions. The lack of symmetry is understandable, to an extent, in the light of the historical experience of Jews as frequent victims of interreligious confrontation. There is a definite place for “defensive dialogue,” of the kind which led to the repudiation by the Catholic Church of the Deicide charge against the Jews. Part of the conversation between Jews and liberal Protestants, in particular, needs to deal with what Jews take to be a Protestant insensitivity to the place of Israel for Jews. But this “defensive” dialogue represents only one dimension of dialogue, what I would call the “community relations” dimension. It is useful and even necessary but need not significantly occupy religious, spiritual or scholarly leadership. It can loyally be conducted by community relations personnel, with some backup and guidance. It will also have a limited lifetime. If interreligious conversation with Jews will be primarily a process of responding to Jewish insecurities, then our conversational partners will rapidly lose interest in it, and so will many thoughtful Jews. What must be explored far more deeply is the agenda of interreligious dialogue as perceived by the Jewish community in the context of Jewish theology and worldview. It is here that the example of Robert Gordis’ work in this field needs to be taken more seriously.

Those who engage in interreligious dialogue, and whose interests transcend the “defensive,” ought to ask themselves about the nature of religious pluralism, particularly of the American variety. For me, this pluralism implies that there is something of value for Jews to be learned from other traditions. This learning can take place both in the context of expressions of shared and parallel beliefs and practices in different traditions and, also, in the context of widely divergent perceptions. In such difficult and troubling challenges to modern religious people as prayer, for example, the spiritual odysseys of individuals of varying traditions can be helpful, informative and even inspiring. Liturgical parallels exist, but so do widely divergent liturgical traditions, and the differences between them might be instructive for the contemporary Jew as he or she seeks to imbue the experience of prayer with new vitality. Both parallel and divergent approaches to Scripture can be enlightening to Jews, and though a familiarity with traditional and modern Jewish exegesis of Scripture is vital for Jewish religious growth and understanding and must be a starting point for the contemporary Jew’s religious exploration, there is no reason why dialogue should not include the study of other traditions’ scriptures and exegesis.

We live at a time of both rampant secularism and resurgent fundamentalism — the latter, in part, at least, a reaction to the former. What is striking about both phenomena is the extent to which they cross religious lines. The lives of most Americans, Christians and Jews,

are devoid of spiritual content or a sense of spiritual hunger. A growing minority, on the other hand, appear open to a genuine spiritual quest. Anti-intellectual, anti-modernist currents are highly visible in both the Christian and Jewish worlds. Messianic pretenders have emerged to one extent or another in both Christianity and Judaism, which also now embrace varieties of Messianic speculation and apocalyptic calculations. Our understanding of these phenomena and our response to them can only be enhanced by including them on the agenda of interreligious conversation, since they represent trans-religious manifestations. They are part of the challenge of secularism and secularization which all religions share. We can be helped as Jews in responding to the deterioration and decline of the religious impulse among Jews by seeking the insights and perceptions of our Christian (and Muslim) partners in dialogue, and sharing ours with them.

Religious conviction and religious pluralism are not naturally compatible. Religions normally assert absolute truth, often explicitly and certainly implicitly. It follows, logically, that other traditions are in error and, therefore, unworthy of serious attention except for purposes of refutation. Jews have historically been the targets of just such views. But if America is truly different, and along with my father, Robert Gordis, I believe that it is, then new possibilities must be considered, and they relate to the very nature of the truth claims of religion. They begin with the Maimonidean assertion that true knowledge of God is beyond human capacity and experience. We attempt to understand the reality of God through human experience in which God reveals Himself to us. The reality of God, even that which is revealed through the act of Divine revelation, is refracted through human consciousness and human understanding. For us, Judaism embodies the truths about God and the world that have come to us through the experience of the Jewish people. Our commitment to the truth of that experience need not devalue the experience or the perceptions of others. They, in their otherness, can enrich and deepen our understanding of ourselves and our understanding of God's world which is the product of our Jewishness. Interreligious dialogue can provide just that.

What ultimately is required is the ability on our part to affirm the validity of other traditions for others, as we assert the authority and truth of our own for ourselves. That, after all, is what we demand of Catholics, Protestants and Muslims in our "defensive" dialogue with them. We want them to affirm that God's Covenant with Israel continues, that Israel continues to be the people of God, and that the religious experience of the Jewish people has not been superseded. If we wish to sustain a meaningful conversation with our Christian and Muslim friends, we will need to be ready to affirm the validity of the traditions which they represent for others, both for reasons of reciprocity, and because, unless we actually believe in the validity of those traditions, there really isn't very much to talk about.

The Rabbi as Darshan

SIMON GREENBERG

A. The Scope of the Modern American Rabbi's Vocation

EVERY PROFESSION CAME INTO BEING IN RESPONSE to some identifiable need or needs, experienced by individuals sufficient in number to call forth a class of professionals who are presumed to be able to satisfy those needs. Perhaps the most troublesome of the problems which has bedeviled the American Rabbinate from its inception is the bewildering number and variety of needs which its clients experience and expect the Rabbi to meet. We shall identify only five of those needs, one or more of which is experienced with a varying measure of intensity, and at various stages in life, by every Jew. They are the needs to relate in a meaningful manner to:

- a) the transcendental — the mysteries that envelop us — to God;
- b) suffering and death;
- c) fellow human beings and the non-human environment;
- d) the awareness of one's Jewishness;
- e) one's self, one's instincts and aspirations.

There are some professionals who are trained to help individuals meet one or another of these needs. This inquiry assumes that they are inseparably inter-related, and the Rabbi is the only professional serving the community who is presumably expected to have been trained to deal with them all as elements in an indivisible complex.

To prepare them for their vocation, the American Rabbinate generally requires its practitioners to undergo a lengthy period of post-graduate education in order to master a vast area of special knowledge and a considerable variety of practical skills — most dominantly, the art of public speaking. In the course of his manifold activities, the Rabbi is called upon to deliver all kinds of addresses, greetings, book-reviews, after dinner talks, and the like. Wisdom counsels him, therefore, to learn and to apply the basic principles governing effective public speech.

The Rabbi may choose to discourse on any topic which is of concern to him and which he thinks is, or should be, of concern to his listeners. But he must ever bear in mind that what distinguishes him from other public speakers is that he is the expounder of an identifiable tradition. As such, his treatment of any subject should reflect his special area of knowledge and expertise. However, the form of public expression which is uniquely his, is what has traditionally been designated as a *drashah*, an ad-

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dress which meaningfully relates a Torah text to one or more of the five needs previously listed.

The term Torah will, in this inquiry, be used to designate not only the *Humash*, or Pentateuch, but the whole of the vast and ever growing realm of Biblical-Rabbinic literature. It consists of the Hebrew Bible, the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds, the Tannaitic and later Midrashim, and all that has been written by Rabbis or by *Talmidei Hakhamim* — learned individuals — who have immersed themselves in the study of the Biblical-Rabbinic heritage and whose writings offer some novel insights into the meaning and contemporary applicability of the texts.

A *drashah* is usually, but not exclusively, delivered during a synagogue service. We customarily designate such an address as a sermon and its deliverer as a preacher. I prefer *darshan* to preacher and *drashah* to sermon not only because they are the traditional Hebrew designations, but, also, because derogatory overtones of meaning have unfortunately become attached to the English terms. Thus, *Webster's New World Dictionary* (1984) defines "sermon" as "any serious talk on behavior, responsibility, etc., especially a long tedious one." To preach is "to give moral or religious advice, esp. in a tiresome manner." Moreover, the terms "sermonizing" and "preaching" are intimately associated with the Christian tradition, and are used interchangeably. To "preach" is to "proclaim" the gospel. This inquiry will be devoted primarily to those aspects of a public address which characterize it as a *drashah*.

B. *The Darshan and Intellectual Integrity*

Because the *darshan* is primarily an interpreter of a tradition as it is reflected in its texts, he must be convinced that what he is attributing to a text truthfully inheres in it. He, above all other professionals, must be "one who speaks truth in his heart" (Psalm 15:2). He may succeed in deceiving others, but he cannot deceive his own "heart" nor or his own mind. Even though the self-deception may remain unnoticed by others, it will steadily and increasingly drain the Rabbi's spiritual resources, and inhibit his intellectual and spiritual creativity. To preserve his intellectual integrity, the *darshan* must, therefore, formulate for himself a religious-philosophical world view which intellectually buttresses the conviction that the Torah constitutes the greatest and indispensable resource available to the Jew to help meet the aforementioned five needs. It is this conviction that energizes an effective Rabbinic career.

This inquiry is not intended to offer him this indispensable intellectual equipment. It is intended to help him resist the ever-present temptation to violate his intellectual integrity by attributing to a text ideas and sentiments that do not literally or implicitly inhere in it, and encourage him to reveal, with conviction and integrity, "the light which radiates from the Torah," so that the listener may glimpse what it was that moved the

psalmist to say, “Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light for my path” (Ps. 119:105).

C. *The Darshan and Value Concepts*

Human beings relate meaningfully to their human and non-human environment by means of value concepts. A value concept is a word or phrase which defies verbal definition, but defines itself through acts which it motivates and by which it is concretized. Value concepts — like love, justice, holiness, liberty — motivate an infinite variety of acts. Indeed, every act insofar as it is specifically human, i.e., insofar as it is more than a mere instinctive, biologically-rooted response to a biologically-rooted need, is a concretization of some value concept. If the act which we performed was done consciously, and if it required some even minimal special effort or sacrifice, and we then are asked why we did it, we would respond by referring to some value concept. Since every *drashah* aims to motivate its listeners to do something that requires some special effort, some minimal sacrifice, then, of necessity, it has at its core, as its ultimate undergirding, as it were, a value concept.

The Torah is the Rabbi’s indispensable and greatest resource because its value concepts constitute the undergirding for his *drashah*. If he is speaking about a subject which is not, and cannot be, significantly related to a Biblical-Rabbinic value concept, what he is saying does not constitute a *drashah*. The theme or the subject of the *drashah* is, therefore, not the specific act which is being advocated, but the value concept which the recommended act is to concretize.

Thus, the festival of Passover may be the occasion for presenting a scholarly or popular disquisition on the history of the festival and its rituals, or the history of human slavery, or the role that the Biblical account of the emancipation from Egypt has played in the struggles of other enslaved peoples. A Rabbi may choose to deliver such a talk on what he considers to be an appropriate occasion, but it is not a *drashah*. If, however, the Rabbi relates the history and the rituals of the festival with family unity, with Judaism’s contribution to human freedom, or with the expression of gratitude to God for having emancipated our ancestors, the value concepts of *Shalom Bayit*, of *Herut*, and of *Hoda’ah* that undergird his talk designate it as a *drashah*. The meaningful relationship of these concepts to one or more of the “five needs” mentioned need not be belabored.

The first hurdle that the *darshan* encounters as he begins to prepare a *drashah* is, therefore, to identify the value concept that will undergird and pervade it. He must be sure that it is a concept that is integral to, or intellectually and emotionally amenable to, integration within the Torah. The most obvious and persuasive evidence that a concept is integral to the Torah is the presence of a Biblical-Rabbinic Hebrew term for it. One of the overarching purposes of the Rabbi is to utilize every opportunity to

integrate these terms into the psychic and active daily life of his listeners, because there is a dynamism that inheres in those terms which motivates those fully aware of them to concretize them in acts.

The Torah abounds in texts containing explicitly formulated or obviously implied value concepts such as: "Justice, Justice shall you pursue" (Deut. 16:20), "Open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land (Ibid., 15:11), "Be ye holy for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2), "Righteousness and Justice are the base of Your-throne. Steadfast love and faithfulness stand before you" (Ps. 89:15), "You shall love him (the stranger) as yourself" (Lev. 19:54), and more. These texts, because of the value concepts which they so clearly and forcefully proclaim or obviously imply, have been the basis of countless *drashot* for millennia. But the texts which the Rabbi is called upon to expound very often do not contain or obviously imply such concepts. I have in mind, particularly, *drashot* that are delivered usually at the *Shabbat* morning service. The *darshan*, seeking to respond to the congregation's expectation and to the long established tradition that he expound some aspect of the Torah portion of the day, searches for a theme in the text. Alternatively, he may have in mind a theme that he would like to talk about, and he wants to "legitimate" the timing of his *drashah* by associating his theme with the text that was read on that day. In either case, when he encounters difficulty with finding what he is seeking, he succumbs to the temptation to make maximum use of his "preacher's license" by attributing to a text a value concept that he knows, or should know, does not inhere in it.

The reason why the *darshan* uses his license so freely is obvious. Why do we tend to accept and even applaud the practice? We do so, I assume, for at least two reasons, one lamentable and the other understandable, but not acceptable. Our ready acceptance of the practice reflects, on the one hand, the widespread attitude that one is not to take a "sermon" seriously. We do not expect a "preacher" to be concerned with accuracy or consistency. We expect him to "move" us emotionally, and intellectual integrity is not usually considered to be a *sine qua non* for an emotionally focused communication. Indeed, we tend to admire the *darshan's* "cleverness" in finding in a text what is not there, even though it does not add to our understanding of, or admiration for, the text. Obviously, it is not the text that we glorify when it is used as a pretext.

In addition, many midrashim, which constitute so large and beloved a portion of the Torah corpus, are based on the attribution to Biblical texts of themes — of concepts, of ideas, and even of "historic" occurrences — that we know do not inhere in them. The modern *darshan* who makes such attributions is, therefore, following a millennially approved tradition which has greatly expanded the scope of the original text and infinitely enriched our spiritual heritage.

The basic fallacy underlying this "justification" for careless use of the "preacher's license" by modern *darshanim* is easily identified. The *darsha-*

nim of the past and their listeners were able to attribute to Biblical texts ideas that to our way of thinking do not inhere in them, without violating their intellectual integrity, because they honestly believed that *hakol bo* — that every thing is explicitly or implicitly to be found in the Torah. Every idea that a Biblical narrative, phrase, word, letter or vowel triggered in the mind of the *darshan* was assumed actually to inhere in the text. The pious *darshan*, regardless of when or where he lived, approached the text with the prayer of the psalmist in his heart: “Open my eyes that I may perceive the wonders of Your teaching” (Ps. 119:18). When the text triggered an idea in his mind, he felt that his prayer was answered. Not only had the text spoken to him, but God had spoken to him through that text. He believed that the idea inhered “in Your teaching.”

For example, Joseph Albo, an outstanding medieval Jewish rationalist theologian, had no intellectual qualms in pointing out in great detail that, in the 139th psalm, “David alludes to three kinds of infinity” (*Ikkarim*, Book II, ch. 25 — Husik translation, Book II, pp. 153-157), and that in Elijah’s vision (I Kings 19:9-12) “Elijah was informed of the division of existence into three worlds, the world of genesis and decay, the world of the spheres and the world of angels” (Ibid., Chapter 31, pp. 216-219). Nor did the Rabbis feel that they were doing violence to the text or to their intellects when they interpreted the Song of Songs as the expression of the relationship of steadfast love between God and Israel.

While we may empathize more readily with the Rabbinic interpretation of the Song of Songs than with Albo’s interpretation of psalm 139 or Elijah’s vision, we can intellectually have as little rapport with the one as we can with the other. But, because both were intellectually honest expressions of their authors’ “perfect beliefs,” we accept them as authentic additions to the corpus of the Torah. It was their way to “magnify and glorify” the Torah.

The modern pious *darshan* is also committed to magnify and glorify the Torah. He also believes that inexhaustible “wonders” residing in the Biblical text await to be discovered and explicated. He also prays that some vision of those wonders will be granted him. He also believes that, just as increasing scholarly, authenticated, historical and philosophical data deepen our understanding of many a heretofore obscure or improperly interpreted Torah text, so do the advances in our understanding of the nature of man, his psychological and emotional endowments, help us plumb the depths of the Torah’s multi-faceted teaching on how we can most nobly exercise those endowments. And he knows, from the depths of his own spiritual experiences, that his acquaintance with the vast realm of human culture has contributed towards magnifying and glorifying the Torah in his eyes. This gives him the assurance that he, too, can reveal glories in the Torah, but without violating his intellectual integrity.

That does not mean that he may not find many an intellectually stimulating idea on the subject of God’s infinity in Albo’s disquisition on the

psalm, or an inspiring insight regarding the relationship between God and Israel in the rabbinic midrashim on *Shir Hashirim*. It means only that he may not find in the Torah texts what Albo and the Rabbis found in them. It means only that when he decides to talk on the subject of the Jewish conception of God's infinity, he may quote Albo but not psalm 139, and when he talks about God's relationship to Israel he may quote a Rabbinic midrash on a passage in *Shir Hashirim*, but he must be sure that his listeners understand that he is referring to a Rabbinic midrash on, but not to the text of, *Shir Hashirim*.

The following few examples picked at random from the Midrash and from modern *darshanim* may help to clarify what is at issue.

1. When Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother, Esau, he instructed them as follows: "Thus shall you say to my brother Esau, 'Thus says your servant Jacob: I stayed (*garti*) with Laban and remained until now'" (Genesis 32:4-6). Because the word *garti* has the same consonants as the word *taryag*, and their numerical value adds up to 613, it triggered the midrash that though Jacob had spent more than twenty years in the company of the evil Laban, he nevertheless observed the 613 *mizvot*. This kind of association was, and is, natural for one who lived, or lives, in a universe of discourse in which the Patriarchs are conceived as having observed the whole Torah before it was revealed at Sinai, and Jacob as having acquired the qualities that made him worthy of prophecy by spending fourteen years in the school of Ever (*Ikkarim*, Bk III, ch. 10, p. 96).

But even for one who no longer can honestly think in those terms, this midrash, like almost every midrash, can trigger a fruitful line of thought if we start by asking what, in the text, and, more particularly, what in the experience of the *darshan* might have stimulated the midrashic comment. For a midrash is, in essence, the response of any reader who "finds" in the text something that is not literally spelled out in it. The response depends upon the contents of the reader's "apperceptive mass"—the sum total of his knowledge and his experiences. Now, what knowledge and what experience made this particular midrash possible?

This midrash required, in the first place, that its author know that the consonants of the term *garti* are the same as those of *taryag*, and that *taryag's* consonants add up to 613 and referred exclusively to the 613 *mizvot*. In addition, the *darshan* could not but have been pre-occupied with the perennial struggle of the average Jew to continue to observe *mizvot* in spite of the hostility or the allurements of an evil or a genial environment. The *darshan* must have been elated when it occurred to him that Jacob was thus subtly both congratulating himself and informing Esau that he had succeeded in resisting an evil environment.

We have no way of knowing whether, or how, this midrash was expanded into a *drashah* by its author. But we have no trouble in identifying the theme of such a *drashah*. It was the theme of unflinching loyalty so movingly expressed by the psalmist, "All this has come upon us yet we

have not forgotten You, or been false to Your covenant" (Ps. 44:18). It was a *drashah* associated with the listener's need for guidance on how to relate to his Jewishness. We can imagine that the *darshan* used his exegesis as the basis for an impassioned appeal to his listeners to follow Jacob's example in observing the *mizvot* within a hostile environment. For his listeners, as for the *darshan*, the *drashah* was revelatory of the "wonders" that inhered in the text. This midrash represents a great temptation to the modern *darshan*, for it deals with his ever present concern to urge his listeners to remain loyal to a tradition that requires one constantly to swim against strong currents. Should he use it as a text for a *drashah*?

I would say that concern for one's intellectual integrity should caution him/her against doing so, because the midrash is here placing words into the mouth of Jacob which can not be associated with him either on the basis of the Biblical account or on the basis of our understanding of the history of his day. There are other Biblical passages and Rabbinic comments referring to Jacob which can be used in a *drashah* wherein Jacob is treated as a model for us. But this far-fetched *drashah* does not enable us honestly to treat Jacob as a model of loyalty to the Torah under difficult circumstances. Moreover, there are so many texts and so many historically authenticated examples of our people's resistance to the environment that one should not have recourse to so questionable a source for this message.

But what is wrong in merely referring to the midrash and saying that it refers to the problem that we all face of resisting the pressures of the environment, and then proceeding with a *drashah* on the subject? There is nothing "wrong" with it except that this midrash is based on the utterly irrelevant coincidence that two words have the same consonants. There is no conceivable rational relationship between them. Moreover, the Biblical passage in which one of these two words occurs deals with a critical period in the life of a Patriarch which, to the best of our understanding, has no relationship to the problem raised by the midrash. Why would Esau be impressed with Jacob's statement that he had observed all the commandments while living in Laban's house? To use this midrash for a *drashah* on resisting the environment is to use a text as a pretext. It is this kind of all-too-frequent use of the "preacher's license" which has largely, though not exclusively, been responsible for the categorization of the sermon, or the *drashah*, as a rhetorical exercise of little intellectual weight or integrity.

A scrupulous abstinence from using a text as a pretext requires great self-discipline, but it has its great rewards. Its greatest reward is the development of a profound regard for the dignity, the sanctity, and the spiritual and intellectual fecundity of the text. One thus learns to listen to what the text has truly to say, rather than to distort it in order to make it say that *he* wants to say. And if he "speaks truth in his heart," he will well know when he is listening to the text and when he is seeking to have

the text listen to him. Above all, he can not hope to have the text reveal its secret to him unless he “listens” with the utmost of attention and reverence.

2. We turn to another well-known and challenging midrash. “Rabbi Yehoshuah ben Levi taught — It is written that . . . ” the Tablets were God’s work and the writing was God’s writing incised (*harut*) upon the Tablets (Exodus 32:16). By merely changing the *a* to an *e*, we get the word *herut*, which means freedom. Since the word appears in a text which deals with the giving of the Torah, Rabbi Yehoshuah infers that it is here used in order to establish an association between Torah and freedom, namely, that “only he is a free man who labors in, or devotes his life to, Torah” (*Avot* 6:2).

This midrash differs from the previous one in that it is not associated with a presumed historic event or individual. It is based on a vowel change in a word, and formulates an opinion of the relationship between the Torah and freedom. Rabbi Yehoshuah was saying something about the Torah which was obviously intended to glorify it. We, too, feel that both the Torah and freedom are glorified when a significant association is established between them. We are not told how Rabbi Yehoshuah specifically identified that relationship. For a *darshan* who believes that such a relationship exists, this text could obviously be used as the basis for a *drashah* to explicate it. But the matter is not as simple as it may appear. We shall discuss the use of this text for a *drashah* later in this inquiry.

And now for two examples from modern *darshanim*:

1. In one sermon, the text that was explicated was: “The woman you put at my side — she gave me of the tree and I ate” (Genesis 3:12). This text is used as an illustration of our refusal “to accept responsibility.” The sermon concludes, “We all make mistakes . . . the mature person admits them and learns a lesson from them. The immature one falls back on alibis.” The text clearly expresses “the refusal to accept responsibility.” However, it does not directly or indirectly associate it with the concept of maturity. That is what the *darshan* reads into the text. On what basis does he do it? Are we to assume that what the text is here telling us is that God created an immature person? There are those who would readily accept that assumption, and then go on to use this text for a *drashah* that God thus indicated that our maturity depends upon us. But that would run counter to the tradition’s conception that Adam, having been created by God Himself, was the acme of human perfection. Moreover, there is no Biblical-Rabbinic term for “maturity.” We have only the term *Bar Mizvah* or *Bar Hiyuva* — signifying that one has reached the age when he (or she) becomes responsible for his acts whether he does or does not accept responsibility for them, unless he is obviously intellectually retarded. This text, therefore, is not concerned with the concept of maturity. We repeat, therefore, a basic principle: a text is not to be associated with a concept which does not inhere in it.

2. "The question is asked why did the Lord create a partner for Adam. After all, Adam had the angels to keep him company . . . One answer is: Adam felt unfulfilled and unhappy because he had no one to whom to give anything . . . When Eve came into the world and a family was acquired later, Adam felt needed and was able to enrich his own life by enriching others . . . *zedakah* is a basic requirement of human nature, because when a person gives and assists, he feels needed and useful." The *darshan* thus associates the theme of *zedakah* with the creation of Eve.

This is a perfect example of an "original" midrash which is attached to a Biblical text with which it has no conceivable intellectually honest association. One has the right to propound the proposition that we feel better when we feel needed or useful. But what gives one the right, as a *darshan* interpreting a text, to say that that might be an answer to the question of why God created Eve? And why should *zedakah*, in essence, be so precious a value concept if its existence depends upon the presence of individuals in need, who thus give other individuals the opportunity to fulfill their "need" to feel needed and useful?

To Summarize

1. A *drashah* must be based upon a positive value concept.
2. The concept should inhere either explicitly or implicitly in the text that will serve as the basis for the *drashah*.

D. The Drashah and the Proposition

The *darshan* should be able to summarize the essence of the message of his *drashah* in one uncomplicated, fairly brief declarative sentence. It is the proposition that his *drashah* is to expound. Its formulation constitutes the major preliminary step to the composition of the *drashah* itself. The contribution that it makes towards the composition of the *drashah* more than compensates for the considerable effort often involved in its formulation.

The subject of the proposition is a value concept expressed either by a specific term or clearly implied in a two or three word phrase. The predicate of the proposition is the traditional or innovative sphere of activity in which the *darshan* commends its concretization.

The value concepts themselves are, generally speaking, self-validating. That is reflected in the fact that we want acts which impinge upon us, whether performed by ourselves or by others, to be acts that concretize them. The *darshan*, therefore, does not have to expound on the virtues of the ethical values. His primary task is to help his listeners develop the frame of mind and the habits that will encourage and enable them to concretize the values in acts.

The Torah is replete not only with value concepts, but, in its laws and narratives, it also identifies acts wherein they are concretized. But the

number of acts wherein a value can be concretized is infinite. Hence, the *darshan*, having identified the value concept that he wishes to commend, must then identify the sphere of traditional or innovative activity within which, and by which, it can, and should be, concretized. That sphere should also be identified by a brief phrase. The *value concept*, then, becomes the subject, and the identified sphere of activity becomes the predicate of a proposition for a *drashah*. The *darshan* should simultaneously be aware of which of the needs of his listeners his *drashah* will address.

Let us now turn to Rabbi Yehoshuah's statement that "Only he is a *ben ḥorin* — a free man — who occupies himself with the Torah," and examine it from the point of view of using it as the text for a *drashah*. The first step that we took is that we translated the text as literally as possible. We did not introduce any idea into the translation which is not literally present in the original, nor did we exclude any idea from the translation which is in the text. The value concept involved is explicitly mentioned. It is freedom. The subject, therefore, of the proposition that we are to formulate is given. It is freedom. The *darshan* need not expatiate on its desirability; he can assume it. The sphere of activity whereby freedom is concretized in the life of the individual is that which occupies the individual with the Torah. That, then, becomes the predicate. The *first* version of the proposition, then, is: "Freedom is experienced by, or is concretized in, the life of an individual only by occupying himself with the Torah."

The word in the English translation of Rabbi Yehoshuah's statement which presents a problem is "only." The *darshan* must decide whether he is ready to maintain that only one who occupies himself with the Torah is a *ben-ḥorin*. He would probably decide against doing so. We shall discuss later the possibility of including the word "only" in a proposition for a *drashah* based on this text. For the present, we shall turn our attention to the subject of Rabbi Yehoshuah's statement — the concept of freedom. What is the scope of its applicability as used in the text? What kind of freedom does Rabbi Yehoshuah's statement envision? Does this text refer to freedom of speech, of religious worship, etc.? From what we know about the ideas prevalent at the time of its composition, it does not. The statement by Rabbi Nehuniah ben Hakanan, in *Avot* II:6, may perhaps point to what Rabbi Yehoshuah had in mind. "Those who accept the yoke of the Torah, are freed from the yoke of government service and of earning a livelihood." This reflects the special status enjoyed by religious functionaries and the learned in all societies.

The question that then arises is whether the term "freedom" in this statement is in any way related to this term as used and understood today. That, in turn, raises the question of whether intellectual honesty implies that we must apply a value concept found in a text only within the limits of the scope within which it was presumably applied at the time of the composition of the text within which it first occurs. This question, we know, was passionately and widely debated in the United States in the

years immediately preceding the Civil War. The question of whether the concept “men” in the Declaration of Independence was intended by its authors to include black men, and whether, if not, it may now be interpreted to include them, played a determinative role in bringing on that war. Every *darshan* should read Lincoln’s opinion on that subject as expressed in his debates with Douglas and in other of his addresses delivered after 1854. This inquiry assumes that the dynamism inherent in a value concept *continues indefinitely to expand its scope*.

Indeed, it is this dynamism, this inherent capacity of the value concepts of a society to expand the scope of their applicability, that enables a society to undergo change without experiencing an unbridgeable rupture with its past, without, as it were, losing its self-identity. It is the dynamism that inheres in the value concept “men” which made it possible for a society that excluded both black people and women from privileges exercised by white males only, to include them, and thereby establishing an infinitely closer relationship with its founders than they had previously experienced. We, therefore, do not consider an enlargement of the scope of applicability of a value concept that is found in an ancient text to be a violation of intellectual integrity, but, rather, as a revelation of the “wonders” that inhere in a value concept.

After one has decided on the concept that will serve as the subject of his proposition, he should study how the concept has been used in the tradition and in the general culture. We shall later comment briefly on the literary resources that should be readily available to the *darshan*. He should never assume that he knows all that there is to know about a value concept and its latent potentialities for an enlarged scope of applicability. When he succeeds in discovering something about the concept that was unknown to him or whose significance he had not previously fully realized, his enthusiasm for sharing that new insight vitalizes the composition and the delivery of the *drashah*. The question for us, then, is whether the concept of freedom as we understand it today is, or can be significantly related to, occupying oneself with the Torah.

We may assume that the *darshan* is acquainted with the vast expansion of the scope of applicability that the concept of freedom has undergone in American life and thought since the Revolution. He should explore the Torah literature to see if the concept of *ben ḥorin* has undergone an analogous process. The first materials to examine are some of the scores of commentaries on the original text. Such material is found or referred to in *Torah Shlemah* on Exodus chapter 32, note 7, in which freedom from any number of evils is associated with “occupying oneself with the Torah” (See *Al Hamikrah V'al Hayahadut* by Moshe Greenberg, p. 96; see, also, poems of Yehudah Halevi, in Loeb, *Jewish Classics*, p. 121). These precedents legitimate the enlargement of the scope of applicability of the concept of freedom to other areas in the Jewish experience in which Jews suffer from “enslavement.”

The area to which, in the twentieth century, the term “enslavement” has been applied by Jews to the Jewish experience, is the sense of Jewish inferiority. Aḥad Ha’Am’s “*Avdut b’Tokh Herut*” is the most brilliant exposition of this kind of enslavement. American Jewish education in the decades preceding the establishment of the State of Israel advocated the cause of Jewish education primarily as the antidote, as the emancipation of Jewish youth from the sense of Jewish inferiority.

We can now return to a consideration of the word “only.” A good case can be made for a *drashah* based on the proposition that “Freedom from an inferiority complex for a Jew can be achieved only by occupying oneself with the Torah.”

We can take note also of the fact that Rabbi Yehoshuah’s statement may be interpreted as having universal applicability, namely, that anyone who occupies himself with the Torah, whether he be Jew or not, can thus become a *ben ḥorin*. This interpretation is possible if we understand *ben ḥorin* to apply to freedom from enslavement to the *yezer ha’ra*, our evil impulses, or from enslavement to the sense of intolerable meaninglessness or to sheer boredom. All human beings fall prey to those ruthless masters. With that in mind, Rabbi Yehoshuah’s statement may be universalized in the proposition that “Certain freedoms become accessible to any human being who occupies himself with the Torah.” But, to the best of my knowledge, few modern American *darshanim* would universalize Rabbi Yehoshuah’s statement in this way.

This does not exhaust all of the potentialities for the enlargement of the scope of the concept of *ben-ḥorin* and its relationship to the Torah, but should be adequate to illustrate what we have in mind when we say that the value concept which serves as the subject of a proposition for the *drashah* must be studied afresh by the *darshan* every time that he makes use of it.

The same careful analysis must be given to the predicate of the proposition. We do not know what specifically Rabbi Yehoshuah had in mind when he spoke of “occupying oneself with the Torah.” But the phrase is not meaningless to us. It brings to mind the student and the teacher of the Torah and their supporters, as well as those who observe its commandments. If we believe that each one of the various ways of occupying oneself with the Torah can concretize the concept of a *ben ḥorin* then we can formulate a considerable number of different propositions by uniting different aspects of the subject with different aspects of the predicate. For example: “Freedom from one’s passions or boredom or meaninglessness may be achieved by an individual by becoming engaged in the support of students and institutions of Torah, or by being a life-long student of Torah.”

The potential relevance of the substantive content of a proposition for a *drashah* to some “need” of the listener should be readily sensed even as is the potential relevance of every one of Hillel’s aphorisms. But it is

only the shallow mind that will labor under the illusion that, by a cursory reading, it has comprehended all of the potential relevancies that inhere in Hillel's aphorisms. If that were so, the mind of a Hillel would not have been required for their formulation. Most of us, therefore, welcome perceptive commentators on Hillel's maxims. A similar quality inheres in a proposition for a *drashah*. Its relevancy to an experienced need should be readily sensed, but all of its relevancies should not be readily self-evident. Nothing is more boring than an elaborate explication of the platitudinous or a platitudinous explication of the profound.

To summarize: a *drashah* is a novel, in-depth explication of a non-platitudinous proposition, based upon a text from the Torah.

Two Liturgical Psalms: Salvation and Thanksgiving

REUVEN HAMMER

This paper is being written in Jerusalem in the third week of January, 1991, when Israel is under murderous attack by Iraqi missiles. It is dedicated to those who suffered in these attacks. May the Psalm of Salvation be answered so that the Psalm of Thanksgiving may be uttered! R.H.]

IT IS A COMMONPLACE AMONG SCHOLARS today that the Book of Psalms is a collection containing not only personal prayers, but also liturgical compositions for use during special ceremonies held at the Temple.¹ Although these texts may have been composed for a specific historical occasion, it is virtually impossible to determine with certainty the specific historical venue for any psalm, and the range of identifications renders these attempts somewhat ludicrous.² It is reasonable, however, to assume that such compositions entered a collection of available liturgy which could be used whenever appropriate. In this paper, an analysis of two such psalms will be undertaken, nos. 115 and 118, in an attempt to understand not the specific events which may have inspired them, but, rather, to determine the nature of the occasion for which they were written, the ideas that they express, and the way in which they were recited.

These two psalms are particularly well known to Jewish worshippers because they are part of the synagogue liturgy and were, before that, part of the liturgy of the Second Temple in the collection of psalms known as *Hallel*, that is recited on special holidays.³ Ironically, this familiarity has also obscured an appreciation of the original meaning of these psalms. This is so in the case of psalm 115 because of the way in which it has been divided into two discrete sections as a result of the practice of reciting what

1. See Nahum Sarna's introduction to Moses Bittenswieser, *The Psalms* (N.Y., 1969), p. xxx; Christoph Barth, *Introduction to the Psalms* (N.Y., 1966), pp. 12, 18ff; Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel* (Chicago, 1960), pp. 9-20.

2. Theories about Psalm 118, for example, range from the first year of the return from the First Exile to Maccabean times. Bittenswieser places it "12 or 13 years after the death blow Artaxerxes III Ochus had dealt Judaea . . ." (*Op. cit.*, pp. 664-66).

3. On the occasions for recitation of the *Hallel* see *Sukkah* 4:8, *Tosefta Sukkah* 3:2 and *Y. Sukkah* 4:5.

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is traditionally known as the Partial *Hallel*,⁴ so that, at times, only the second half of the psalm is recited, and at no time is it recited as a single, unified, composition. Psalm 118 has some specific ways of being recited in the synagogue which may distract from seeing it as one unit.⁵

Psalm 115: A Plea for Salvation

Psalm 115 is universally recognized as a liturgical psalm. M. Dahood (*Anchor Bible Psalms*, Vol. III, New York, 1970) calls it a "liturgical psalm contrasting the omnipotence of Israel's God with the utter ineffectuality of heathen deities," and dates it as pre-Exilic (p. 139). Frank Ballard (*Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IV, N.Y. 1955) speaks of it as a liturgical psalm for a "perilous situation" (p. 606). Artur Weiser (*The Psalms*, London, 1962) writes of it as "cultic liturgy," probably recited on a pilgrim festival, the main theme of which "is the revelation of the Name . . . which results in the blessing . . ." (p. 714). This author agrees that it is appropriate for a perilous situation, but sees the aim of the psalm as assuring the people of eventual triumph.

Section 1. Verses 1-3.

Not to us, O Lord, not to us
but to Your Name bring glory
for the sake of Your love and Your faithfulness.
Let the nations not say,
"Where now is their God?"
when our God is in heaven
and all that He wills He accomplishes.⁶

As indicated by the usage of the first person plural, the people address God with a plea for action. Save us, they ask, not for our sake, not because of Israel, but for Your own sake. This is a variation of the idea expressed in Exodus 32:12, where Moses argues that the destruction of Israel (in that case by God Himself in His anger) will result only in a desecration of God's Name by the nations, who will misinterpret this as an evil act on God's part, and thus bring desecration to the name of God (*hillul ha-Shem*):

Let not the Egyptians say, "It was with evil intent that He delivered them
...."

Any victory over Israel will bring about this desecration, while a victory will result in glory to His Name (*kiddush ha-Shem*). Since God is great and all-powerful (v. 3), surely He can intervene and answer their request.

4. See R. Hammer, "On the Origin of the Partial Hallel," *Conservative Judaism* (Summer, 1969).

5. On various methods of reciting the *Hallel*, see *Talmudic Encyclopedia* (Jerusalem, 1959), Vol. IX, pp. 411-14.

6. The translations in the article are from *Tanakh* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), unless otherwise stated.

Section 2.(a) Verses 4-8

Their idols are silver and gold,
 the work of men's hands.
 They have mouths, but cannot speak,
 eyes, but cannot see;
 they have ears, but cannot hear,
 noses, but cannot smell;
 they have hands, but cannot touch,
 feet, but cannot walk;
 they can make no sound in their throat.

The Levites here respond by asserting that the gods of the nations are non-existent. This section (2a) is a stereotypic, satirical description and rejection of idolatry, followed by a plea for trust in the only true God (2b). These verses occur virtually verbatim in Psalm 135:15-20, where they stand in contrast to a detailed description of God's powers.⁷ Here they complement v.2's assertion that God can do anything. Idols, on the other hand, can do absolutely nothing. God makes everything. Idols are made by man but can, themselves, make nothing. Similarly, those who lean upon them when coming to destroy Israel shall be powerless (v. 8). This description of idols, as fetish objects lacking reality and power, sums up the Israelite attitude toward idolatry which was, as Kaufmann pointed out so well,⁸ so complete a rejection as to indicate a lack of understanding of the true beliefs of idol worshippers.

Section 2.(b) Verses 9-11.

O Israel, trust in the Lord!
 He is their help and shield.
 O House of Aaron, trust in the Lord!
 He is their help and shield.
 O you who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord!
 He is their help and shield.

The word "trust," which appeared in v.8, is seized upon and becomes the focal point of each of these verses. Just as the trust which idolaters put in their worthless objects of worship will render them worthless, so trust that is put in the Lord will, by contrast, result in victory and salvation. Unlike section 1, which was written in the first person plural, these verses address the people in the second person, and refer to them in the third person, indicating that they are uttered by the leaders of the ceremony, the Levites. They are addressed, in turn, to the people of Israel, to the Priests and to all who worship the Lord.

7. Since this description is so central to Psalm 135, where it forms the main subject and is the negative side of a discussion of the subject of the true God versus the idols, it is likely that it appeared there first and was taken from there for our psalm and simply became the "official" definition of idolatry, quoted whenever the subject arose.

8. See Y. Kaufmann, *Op. cit.*, pp. 9-20.

Section 3. Verses 12-13.

The Lord is mindful of us.
 He will bless us;
 He will bless the House of Israel;
 He will bless the House of Aaron;
 He will bless those who fear the Lord,
 small and great alike.

Returning to the first person plural of section 1, this section constitutes the response of the people to the exhortation in section 2b. The plea for trust in the Lord has not fallen upon deaf ears. The people are prepared to place their trust in the Lord and, therefore, they experience the feeling that God has remembered their needs and will take action on their behalf. God's being "mindful" — *zakhrenu* (v. 12) — of them, is the same usage of the word as is found in Lev. 26:42 and 45 and numerous other places,⁹ and means that God is now undertaking to fulfill the solemn word given to Israel's ancestors to protect this people.¹⁰ His mindfulness will be expressed in His extending His blessing, in this case His salvation, upon them all.

The word *zakhrenu*, is, indeed, the turning point and the psychological crux of this psalm. At the beginning, we find a people pleading out of fear and desperation for salvation from a pagan enemy. When they hear the proclamation of the utter powerlessness of the nations and their idols, as opposed to the power of the Lord, and are told that they need not fear, for God is their protector, they undergo an experience of trust and confidence which transforms them. It is as if their salvation has already come, for God has remembered them.¹¹ The four times in which the word "trust" appears in the previous section are echoed here by the fourfold repetition of "bless." Trust brings blessing. There is also a similar repetition of the three groups — Israel, the House of Aaron, and those who fear the Lord. This is particularly effective as an antiphonal device, since section 3 is the answer of the people to the words of the Levites in section 2. Obviously, the word "blessing" has a special significance in the context of Temple ceremonies, since the Temple was the site of the cultic act of the Blessing of the Priests (Numbers 6:22-27). The Blessing was the main benefit to be gained by going to the Temple. As Psalm 24 puts it:

He shall carry away a blessing from the Lord,
 a just reward from God, his deliverer (v. 5).

Coming to the Temple, invoking God, they will receive His blessing

9. See also Jer. 31:20, Gen. 9:15, Jer. 44:21, Ex. 6:5, Gen. 8:1, Gen. 30:22, Ex. 2:24.

10. See Gen. 21:1. The words are used as parallels in Jer. 15:15.

11. It is for this reason that I believe that Dahood's imaginative interpretation of the word *zakhrenu* to be "our throne" to be incorrect. He amends the text to read *zakhrenu*, instead of *zikhharanu*, and translates the phrase as "Our throne may Yahweh bless," referring to the king. This removes from the psalm the pivotal point, the assurance that God will act.

which, in this case, assumes a double meaning. In addition to the words of blessing, it symbolizes His positive answer to their plea for salvation.

Section 4. Verses 14-15

May the Lord increase your numbers,
yours and your children's also.
May you be blessed by the Lord,
Maker of heaven and earth.

As in Section 2b, the second person form of address is used. Israel is told by the Levites that they may now expect the blessing of God, an indication of forthcoming salvation. The word "blessed," used in the previous section, is repeated here. Indeed, you *will* be blessed by the Lord. God is described as the creator of heaven and earth, which echoes v.3's description of Him as creating whatever He wills.

Section 5. Verses 16-18.

The heavens belong to the Lord,
but the earth He gave over to man.
The dead cannot praise the Lord,
nor any who go down into silence.
But we will bless the Lord
now and forever.
Halleluyah.

The return of the first person plural indicates that here the people respond, linking their response to the previous section by repeating the words "heavens" and "earth" from v.15 and commenting upon them. The reference to the dead in v.17 obliquely reminds us that the people face the possibility of death if defeated by an enemy, but because God has promised to save them, they are confident that they will not die and will, therefore, be able to continue to bless God. The main message of the section, however, is in the repetition of the word "bless," which appears yet once more in v.18, but this time in response to the blessings which God has bestowed upon the House of Israel. Israel's response is to proclaim the blessedness of God,¹² and then concludes by the ecstatic praise of God, *Halleluyah*. That which began as the expression of concern by the people in the face of a threat, concludes with the expression of great confidence in God's salvation of His people.

Summary

Psalm 115, then, clearly arises from the situation of Israel at a time of danger, facing the threat of enemy attack, and expresses the fears of the people. A description of exactly such a situation can be found in Jeremiah 7 and Isaiah 58. Coming to the sacred shrine, the people appeal to God

12. On the term "bless," see R. Hammer, "What Did They Bless?" *JQR* (Summer, 1991).

to save them, not for their sake, but for His. Otherwise, the nations will think that the God of Israel does not have any reality, whereas we know that He is the only reality, the sole creator of all that exists. They are reassured that, indeed, the idols of the nations have no power. Therefore, those who trust in them trust in nothing and can have no effect. All that Israel need do is put its trust in the Lord in order to be saved. Accepting this assurance, the people are moved from a mood of doubt and despair to one of trust, and they attain a feeling of confidence that God *will* save them and bless them. They, in turn, bless God for His salvation.

This antiphonal psalm may be summarized as follows:

The People. Section 1. Save us, O Lord, at this time of distress so that the nations will not question Your power.

The Levites. Section 2. The idols of the nations are nothing. So, too, shall be those who worship them. Trust in the Lord and He will save you.

The People. Section 3. Indeed, God will save us and will bless us.

The Levites. Section 4. You have received the blessing of God. Salvation is yours.

The People. Section 5. For this, we, who remain alive and will not perish, praise the Lord of our salvation.¹³

Israel has moved from doubt and despair to trust, confidence and salvation.

Psalm 118: A Psalm of Thanksgiving

Dahood describes this as a thanksgiving psalm which was recited by a king triumphantly entering the Temple following a victory.¹⁴ This writer's interpretation is that it need not be seen as primarily connected to a monarch, but, on the contrary, is a thanksgiving ceremony for the people of Israel. Indeed, it resembles the kind of religious feeling which was later incorporated in Judaism as the *gomel* blessing,¹⁵ expressing one's feelings upon having escaped a dangerous situation. In the words of Psalm 13:6:

I will sing unto the Lord
for He has dealt graciously with me.

Section 1. Verses 1-4.

Acknowledge¹⁶ the Lord, for He is good,
His steadfast love is eternal.
Let Israel declare,

13. Dahood (*Op. cit.*) offers a suggestion as to the antiphonal divisions. He sees choral sections (vv. 1-2 and 9-11), a solo passage (vv. 3-8), a blessing by the priests (vv. 12-15), and a hymn of praise (vv. 16-18). I favor seeing it as a dialogue between the Levites and the people. It is also possible that the people are represented by a section of the Levitical choir (p. 139).

14. Dahood, *Op. cit.*, p. 155.

15. "Blessed are You ... Who has performed acts of kindness for me."

16. JPS: Praise. Dahood: Give thanks.

"His steadfast love is eternal."

Let the House of Aaron declare

"His steadfast love is eternal."

Let those who fear the Lord declare,

"His steadfast love is eternal."

The ceremony of acknowledgement of God's faithful love, which may be loosely termed "thanksgiving," was held in the Temple, and was expressed through the recitation of the *Hodu* formula. This term acquired the technical meaning of calling upon the people to acknowledge God's beneficence as experienced in the Divine role in their triumphant salvation. Neither "thanksgiving" nor "praise" does justice to the meaning of *Hodu*. It is a public, thankful acknowledgement of what God has done. In this paper, the term "acknowledge" will be used to express this concept. Psalm 136, which, no less than twenty six times, repeats the answering formula, "His steadfast love is eternal," is the primary example of this ritualistic formula. Others can be found in Psalms 106 and 107 and elsewhere.¹⁷ The act of reciting the *Hodu* is the act of acknowledging the steadfastness and dependability of the Lord, a greatly heightened sense of thanksgiving. It was done, as we saw in Psalm 136, by reciting the words "His steadfast love is eternal." Here, the three groups to be found among the people, the same three groups as were mentioned in Psalm 115, are called upon to perform the ceremony. Either they recited the second stich of the verse or they repeated it after the Levites. The phrase will be repeated as the climax of the ceremony in the last verse of the psalm.

Section 2. Verses 5-20.

In distress I called on the Lord;
the Lord answered me and brought me relief.
The Lord is on my side,
I have no fear;
what can man do to me?
With the Lord on my side as my helper,
I will see the downfall of my foes.
It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to trust in mortals;
it is better to take refuge in the Lord

17. See also Ps. 7:18 where the writer asks God to save him, and says that then he will "acknowledge" God and sing unto Him; Ps.9:2 — he will "acknowledge" Him when his enemies are defeated; in 44:8 it is also used in the context of defeat of enemies; 54:8 — he will acknowledge God "for He is good," a shortened form of "for he is good, His steadfast love is eternal;" 109:30 — he will acknowledge God after his adversaries are ashamed; 111:1 where he acknowledges God and then recounts His great works, in this case His wonderful works; 138:1-2 — he "acknowledges" God for his "steadfast Love" shown by God's continual protection; 30:13 where God is "acknowledged" for healing and saving from trouble; 33:2 where the people are called upon to "acknowledge" God for having protected and saved His people; 100 which is an invitation to perform the *Hodu* ceremony because of His goodness and His steadfast love. This usage appears in other books of the Bible as well.

than to trust in the great.
 All nations have beset me;
 by the name of the Lord I will surely cut them down.
 They beset me, they surround me;
 by the name of the Lord I will surely cut them down.
 They have beset me like bees;
 they shall be extinguished like burning thorns;
 by the name of the Lord I will surely cut them down.
 You pressed me hard,
 I nearly fell;
 but the Lord helped me.
 The Lord is my strength and might;
 He has become my deliverance.
 The tents of the victorious resound with joyous shouts of
 deliverance,
 "The right hand of the Lord is triumphant!
 The right hand of the Lord is exalted!
 The right hand of the Lord is triumphant!"
 I shall not die but live
 and proclaim the works of the Lord.
 The Lord punished me severely,
 but did not hand me over to death.
 Open the gates of victory for me
 that I may enter them and praise the Lord.

This central section of the psalm describes the circumstances of distress followed by triumph which are the cause of this *Hodu* ceremony. Unlike Ps. 136, where the people rehearse their sacred history and then acknowledge God for what He did for their ancestors, here He is acknowledged for something which has just been experienced by the people of Israel and for which they must publicly thank and acknowledge Him appropriately.

The literary structure here differs from that of Psalm 115. There, small groups of verses were recited in their entirety, alternatingly. Here, the divisions are less between sections of verses than within the verses themselves, each of which is very obviously divided into two brief stiches, leading to the assumption that they were recited alternately, with the Levites reciting stich *a* and the people stich *b*. It is possible that the recitation was between two choirs of Levites or two divisions of the people.

Most striking is the fact that this central section is entirely in the first personal singular. This has led to many different interpretations of the psalm and its hero. As mentioned above, Dahood, among others, assumes that this is the personal psalm of a king returning in triumph. Although an obvious possibility, it is not the only one, or even the preferred one. In order to understand this section and determine the hero, one must recognize its resemblance to the first and most famous of all songs expressing thanksgiving at God's salvation: the Song at the Sea, found in Exodus 15. The short verses here, their rhythm and sound, are deliberately anachronistic in the sense of being in imitation of that ancient Song. To pre-

clude the unlikely possibility that one would not immediately sense this, this psalm includes an exact quotation from the Song:

The Lord is my strength and might
He has become my deliverance. (v.14)

This is an exact quotation from Exodus 15:2, the second verse of the Song. In addition, verses 15-16:

The right hand of the Lord is triumphant!
The right hand of the Lord is exalted!
The right hand of the Lord is triumphant!

echo and paraphrase another verse from the Song:

Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power.
Your right hand, O Lord, shatters the foe! (Exodus 15:6)

This imitation of the Song at the Sea accounts for the use of the first person singular as well, since that is the style of the Song. Although it is Israel's song of triumph, recited by Moses and the people of Israel, it is entirely in the first person singular. Israel is personified and sings to God. The same format is used here. Perhaps the king played the role of Moses here, leading the triumphant procession which recites this song, just as their ancestors sang theirs. In any case, it is a song of the people performing this ritual of public thanksgiving-acknowledgment, and not the personal song of a king.

The liturgical nature of these psalms, and the fact that they were to be recited as some sort of dialogue, was expressed by the rabbinic sources in their descriptions of the recitation of the *Hallel*.¹⁸ The Talmud, too, has an imaginative description in which different verses of Psalm 118 are assigned to different individuals.¹⁹

However it may have been recited, the central portion, which describes the events leading up to this thanksgiving ceremony, tells of a dangerous and difficult situation, and describes Israel in mortal peril, surrounded by its enemies. Israel had called upon the Lord, quite possibly in a ceremony similar to that described in Psalm 115 (see above), and had been answered. Their triumph was complete. The Lord repeated for them that which He had done for their ancestors at the Sea. Although the battle was difficult, they triumphed and had not perished (v. 18). Alternative interpretations which view this as a personal thanksgiving psalm, in which an individual speaks of his triumph over his enemies, are based on the mistaken notion that the use of the first person singular cannot be understood otherwise, and ignore both the historical precedent of the Song of the Sea and the rather clear references to military triumph in the Psalm itself.²⁰

18. B. *Sotah* 30b.

19. B. *Pes.* 119a assigns sections to David, Jesse, David's brothers, and Samuel.

20. Ballard, *Op. cit.*, says that it is "reasonable to suppose with Gunkel that the basis was an individual's hymn of thanksgiving ... this explains the I ... " (p. 616).

This section concludes with a request for permission to enter the precincts of the Temple. The recitation of a text prior to entering the Temple was certainly not uncommon. Psalm 24, for example, provides us with another example where the people request permission to enter:

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?
Who may stand in His holy place? (v. 3)

O gates, lift up your head!
Up high, your everlasting doors . . . (v. 7)

Dahood²¹ describes our verse as “the triumphant king at the head of his army commands that the gates be thrown open.” He further believes that the gates referred to in verse 19 are those of the city of Jerusalem, while the gate in verse 20 is that of the Temple. Our interpretation would be that the people, personified here in the first person singular, requests permission to enter the Temple precincts in order to perform the ceremony. The Psalm seems to indicate clearly that verse 20 is an answer to the request of verse 19. To have them refer to different places, then, would be rather strange.

Section 3. Verse 20.

This is the gateway to the Lord —
the victorious shall enter through it.

The Levites (or possibly the Priests) respond to the people and invite them to enter the sanctuary.

Section 4. Verses 21-24.

I acknowledge²² You, for You have answered me,
and have become my deliverance.
The stone which the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvelous in our sight.
This is the day that the Lord has made —
let us exult and rejoice on it.²³

These verses bring us to the heart of the ceremony. The *Hodu* ceremony consists of two basic parts. The first is the recitation of the circum-

Butenwieser, *Op. cit.*, on the other hand, interprets the I “not as the author speaking of himself but the voice of the people speaking through him” (p. 661). Unfortunately, he rejects the idea that this was a liturgical poem recited antiphonally, and sees it, rather, as “a finished poem” (p. 663). He attempts a quite specific post-exilic dating (p. 666) which, as N. Sarna points out in his prolegomenon to the reprinted edition, is quite unlikely (pp. xviii-xix).

21. *Op. cit.*, p. 159.

22. JPS: I praise. Dahood: I thank.

23. Or, as Dahood translates: This is the day Yahweh acted, let us exult and rejoice in him! (*Op. cit.*, p. 159).

stances which have brought Israel publicly to acknowledge God gratefully. This was done in section 2. The second part is the actual acknowledgement found here. The response to the Levites' call to the people in Section 1:

acknowledge the Lord. (v. 1)

is:

I acknowledge You. (v. 21)

The accepted translation of "praise" (or "thank") for the word *Hodu* in its various forms is misleading. There are many words for praise in Hebrew, the most common being *hallel*, but each one has its specific meaning which is difficult to convey in another language. *Hallel* is ecstatic praise, *Barukh*, Blessed, is the proclamation of God's exalted status, while *Hodu*, from *Todah* or Thanks, is gratefully to acknowledge His acts of salvation. This concept is expressed clearly in v.21:

I acknowledge You, for You have answered me,
and have become my deliverance.

Verses 23 and 24 emphasize God's role in the deliverance:

This is the Lord's doing ... (v. 23)

This is the day the Lord has made ... (v. 24)

and it is the awareness of these acts which causes Israel to respond and recite *Hodu*:

... it is marvelous in our sight. (v. 23)

... let us exult and rejoice on it. (v. 24)

The change to first person plural makes it clear that the people as a whole plays the central part in this triumphant ceremony.

Section 5. Verse 25.

O Lord, deliver us!

O Lord, let us prosper!

The people call upon the Lord for deliverance. Although this may seem superfluous in a ceremony celebrating deliverance, it is not. Rather, it is to be understood as a request that God continue to deliver the people in the future as He has done now.

Section 6. Verse 26.

May he who enters be blessed in the name of the Lord;
we bless you from the House of the Lord.

The thanksgiving-acknowledgement declaration of the people and their plea for continued deliverance is responded to positively by the officiants, who proclaim that those who have entered the Sanctuary are, indeed, worthy recipients of God's blessing, and shall receive that blessing in the Lord's house. This is a reference to the Priestly blessing, which was the

object of coming to the Temple, and which was recited by the Priests either at the conclusion of the *Hodu* ceremony or at this point.

Section 7. Verses 27-29.

The Lord is God;
He has given us light;
bind the festal offering to the horns of the altar with
cords.
You are my God and I will acknowledge You;
You are my God and I will extol You.
Acknowledge the Lord for He is good.
His steadfast love is eternal.

The ceremony concludes with the proclamation of the Lord as the supreme God:

The Lord is God. (v. 27)

You are my God ...
You are my God ... (v. 28)

This proclamation is similar to that made by Elijah during his confrontation with the prophets of Baal (I Kings 18:39). When the triumph of the Lord has been made manifest:

... all the people flung themselves on their faces
and cried out, "The Lord alone is God: The Lord
alone is God!"

More importantly, the Psalm concludes with yet another echo of the Song at the Sea after which it is patterned:

You are my God and I will acknowledge You;
You are my God and I will extol You. (v. 28)

It is clearly patterned after:

This is my God and I will glorify Him;
My father's God and I will extol Him. (Ex. 15:2)

This is the second half of the very same verse which was quoted verbatim in verse 14 above! Note that three of the five Hebrew words in 118:28 are nearly identical with three of the six words in Ex. 15:28.: *Eli* (my God); *Elohai* (my God); and *aromimekha* — *va'aromimenhu* (I will extol You — and I will extol Him).²⁴ Following this return to the Exodus theme, the psalm concludes with the reiteration of the *Hodu* formula.

Summary

This Psalm is a ceremony of grateful public acknowledgement of God's deliverance of the people of Israel from danger, similar to that faced by Israel at the Sea, and deliberately uses anachronistic wording and

24. The pointing is different in the word, *Elohei*.

literary structure to emphasize the parallel. It consists of the following sections and ideas:

Section 1. The people, gathered outside the Temple, are called upon by the Levites to come and perform the ceremony of thanksgiving.

Section 2. The ceremony begins with a recitation of the plight of Israel, and concludes with their triumph achieved by the Lord's active interference,²⁵ i.e., the reason for the ceremony.

Section 3. Permission is requested to enter the Temple in order to perform the ceremony.

Section 4. Permission is granted and the people enter.

Section 5. The continuation of the *Hodu* ceremony is performed, i.e., the public proclamation and grateful acknowledgement of God's deliverance.

Section 6. The people call upon God to continue His salvation in the future.

Section 7. The Levites respond that Israel is, indeed, blessed by the Lord.

Section 8. The ceremony concludes with the proclamation of the Lord as God, and a repetition of the *Hodu* formula.

If this psalm is typical of the ceremony of thanksgiving, we can say that it consists of the following parts:

1. the call to proclaim God's salvation,
2. a recitation of the deliverance performed by the Lord,
3. entering the Temple and reciting the acknowledgement — thanksgiving to God,
4. requesting continued deliverance,
5. assurance that the ceremony has been acceptable and blessing attained,
6. proclamation of allegiance to the Lord.²⁶

It is interesting to note that the *Hodu* ceremony has left a lasting impact upon Jewish liturgy in the *Modim* blessing of the central prayer of Judaism, the *Amidah*. This paragraph comes as the climax of the *Amidah*²⁷ and acknowledges God formally through the term *modim* ("we give thanks") as well as *nodeh* ("we will give thanks") — which is merely the plural form of *odekha* as used in rabbinic Hebrew and in Psalm 18, v.21 — and then proceeds to delineate the reasons for this thankful acknowledgement: telling God's wonders, His protection, His wonders (again), and His goodness. It officially proclaims that "You are the Lord our God," thus echoing sections 1, 2, and 6 outlined above. Most telling of all, it contains

25. Similarly, the telling of the story of the Exodus on Passover night must begin with the description of the lowly status of the Israelites and concludes with their triumph (*Pes.* 10:4).

26. An investigation of the ceremony as reflected in all the *Hodu* psalms is beyond the scope of this paper, but would be useful.

27. See *Sifre D.*, *Piska* 343.

a rabbinic version of the Psalmist's acknowledgement formula: "Acknowledge the Lord for He is good, His steadfast love endures forever," in the following line from the *Modim* prayer: "The Good One, for His mercies never cease; The Merciful One, for His steadfast love never ceases, we forever hope in You." The ancient ceremony of the Temple is thus repeated thrice daily in Jewish worship.

Conclusion

The two psalms discussed in this paper are examples of specific liturgical ceremonies which were performed in the Temple in the period of the first Temple. Ceremonies were held there at special times, such as that described in Jeremiah 7 and elsewhere. These two psalms are also complementary to one another, the first being a ceremony calling upon God to save the people, the second a ceremony responding to God's salvation.

[The preparation of this paper was completed after the defeat of Iraq. "I acknowledge You, for You have answered me . . . " RH]

Repairing the Broken Vase: Reaching Our Jewish Grandchildren and Our Jewish Grandparents

STEVEN HUBERMAN

“In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it.”

Oscar Wilde

OSCAR WILDE IS RIGHT. WE MAY BE OUTWARDLY successful, but we yearn for something else. Even those who have “made it” socio-economically are asking questions such as —

Is this all there is to life?

Is life only a brief biological experience?

What am I really supposed to do to make a difference?

Judaism has always tried to answer these questions. *Ecclesiastes* (3:1-4) has memorialized these lines:

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted. . . , a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.

Despite these thoughts, many people today are unsure of the path to personal fulfillment. We try, but we often discover only false paths, deadends.

In order to describe the spiritual paths on which Jews are traveling, the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles mounted a unique study. We conducted a detailed survey among over 1700 Jews. We sought to analyze affiliated and unaffiliated Jews. Our goal was to ascertain how Jews are gaining religious and spiritual fulfillment, how they are answering the key questions about what being Jewish is all about. We also wanted to recommend ways to modify our communal institutions so that more Jews would become meaningfully involved, and help Jews to gain the fulfillment they seek. Our research results follow. Before I elucidate what we found, I begin with a picture of how people, in general, and Jews, in particular, are seeking religious gratification today.

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Ancient Faiths, New Vessels

Dr. George Schwartz* practices psychology in Manhattan. When, as a youth, he left home for college, he stopped acting Jewish. His daughter, Carol, might have drifted even further from her roots. Instead, at age 19, Carol recently called her dad from Israel. Against all odds, she had become *frum* (observant) — keeping kosher, observing *Shabbat*, and was ready to enroll in a Yeshiva.

There are many Carols today. Her male counterparts are wearing the beards that their grandfathers shaved off. Some young people, having grown up in materialistic homes, are looking for spiritual values. As Carol tells us, she was drawn to Judaism because it gave sanctity to every moment in her life.

Dr. John Kildahl, Professor of Pastoral Counseling at the New York Theological Seminary, observes that today's adolescents want a structured belief system. "They are at sea between childhood and adulthood, testing other forms of certainty — and if the parents haven't given it to them, they look where they can get it."¹ They see the uncertainties of life. In response, they want a belief system that says something about life's mysteries. Sometimes, parents react sympathetically to their children's return to religion. When feelings cannot be reconciled, parents and children sometimes stop communicating altogether.

Ethnic identity is, today, "in" among all age groups, particularly among the elderly. Ethnicity gives people, especially the old, a strong sense of who they are. When you grow old, you often lose many pieces of yourself — health, finances, friends, family. The one thing that you can keep is the piece of you that belongs to a particular ethnic group. Ethnicity is, therefore, important to good aging.

Bessie Schuman is 74. After she divorced her husband, she had no friends. "So I decided to seek out people with whom I could relate, and I automatically sought out Jews. It was a re-awakening process."²

Some persons are returning to the conventional religions of America — Protestantism, Catholicism, or Judaism. Others are into the New Age blend of more radical religious approaches and spirituality. New Age book stores have doubled in the past five years to 250 in number. Magazines, like the *New Age Journal*, are replete with ads like "Heal Yourself with Crystals" or "New Health Through Colon Rejuvenation." A major petro-chemical company recently hired a faith healer to "read auras." The U.S. Army is investigating the military potential of meditation and extrasensory perception. Shirley MacLaine, the movie star, leads her followers to meditate on the body's energy points. At one

* This and other names of persons whose stories are referred to in this paper, and their stories, are fictitious, although based on real incidents.

1. "Children Embrace Ancient Faiths," *New York Times*, April 3, 1985, page 16.

2. "Relationships — Ethnic Identity in Old Age," *New York Times*, July 22, 1985.

of her recent gatherings, 1200 persons paid \$300 each to attend a seminar in the New York Hilton ballroom.

There are many different New Age beliefs, fads, and rituals. Some are connected with Christianity and Eastern faiths. New Age is hard to define. New Agers question rationalism, high technology, and routine living. Great significance is attached to relics and sacred objects, specifically crystals. The therapeutic touch is supposed to work. They want to be on the road to personal happiness and health.

This mixture is sweeping across the country. It does have its critics. Alan Dundes, Professor of Anthropology and Folklore at Berkeley, calls much of this a

cop-out, an escape from reality, an anti-intellectual movement. The New Age movement reflects anxieties of one sort or another — the threat of nuclear warfare, the President running a vigilante action out of the White House . . . People look at all this and say, "If this is the Establishment, then I don't want this. I want something else, something I can trust." *It's people latching onto a belief system to get certainty where there is no certainty.*³

Regardless of how you evaluate the New Age, it does reflect a renewed interest in spirituality. Faith healers, channelers, and crystals are more than a passing phase on the American scene.

What ties the young, the old, and the New Age generations together is their quest for spirituality. How is all of this affecting Judaism? Is the rise in spirituality really spreading across the Jewish community? Have New Age philosophies made an impact on modern Jewish living? We now turn to Los Angeles, the second largest Jewish community in the United States, to sketch the condition of Jewish belief.

Growing Up

To draw a portrait of Jewish spiritual awareness, we surveyed a cross-section of 1744 Jews in metropolitan Los Angeles. Our goal was to see whether they reflected New Age characteristics.

The majority of our sample grew up in homes where they and their parents belonged to synagogues. Although half of our respondents believed that their parents were very, or somewhat, religious when they were growing up, the actuality differs. The yearly rituals were the most frequently observed. Attendance at a Passover Seder was the top choice, followed by lighting Hanukkah candles and fasting on Yom Kippur. Most parents engaged in all of these activities. By contrast, the weekly and daily religious acts were generally not followed.

A minority of parents lit Sabbath candles, kept kosher, or attended weekly synagogue services. Those respondents who were over the age

3. "New Age Harmonies," *Time*, December 7, 1987, page 72.

of 55 or were foreign born were most likely to have come from observant homes. West Coast children came from the least observant backgrounds.

This pattern of religious observance follows a classic sociological model. Parents observe only those rituals which are capable of redefinition in contemporary terms. Both Hanukkah and Passover reflect the modern ideal of freedom. They stress the desire to overcome bondage and religious intolerance. These popular customs do not require social isolation. By contrast, complete *Shabbat* observance does require a unique life style. As a result, only the most dedicated observe it.

Rituals are retained if they make "sense" in the larger non-Jewish community; they provide a Judaic alternative to Western, i.e., Christian, culture. Some Jewish holidays are seen as corresponding to popular Christian holidays. The obvious example is Hanukkah. When we exchange gifts and light *menorot*, we parallel Christmas. For some, the "Jewish Christmas" is Hanukkah.

Another reason for the popularity of Passover and Hanukkah is their child orientation. The Seder conveys the miracle of the Exodus to the next generation. Hanukkah is replete with gifts, *gelt* and *dreydl* games. Children are eager participants in such joyous occasions.

The popular observances are performed once a year or infrequently. Yom Kippur comes annually and does not require a significant time investment. The far more important adherence to *Shabbat* necessitates an entire religious regimen on a frequent basis. As noted above in another context, only the more pious go this route.⁴

Our respondents reflect this secularization of the Jewish religion. Religion is confined to a diminishing portion of life. When Judaism requires daily or routine individual commitments, only those with the strongest Jewish backgrounds participate. The yearly rituals persist; the weekly or daily ones do not. Classical Judaism emphasizes sanctifying the everyday. Today, rituals happen only on special occasions.

We probed the feelings and backgrounds of those who have taken Judaism seriously. We asked them about their most positive Jewish feelings. The respondents constantly observed that, for them, Judaism is *community*. This bonding was put this way:

Judaism gives me . . . a sense of community and common heritage, values and understanding and a support system that is humane and instructive. I know that I am part of something universal and everlasting, that I can go anywhere in the world and, when I meet another Jew, I will find succor . . . Since my children are grown I find I still want to belong to a congregation or Jewish organization because it is like having an extended family.

For the large majority, the most enjoyable experiences happen on Jewish holidays. Respondents told us,

For me the happiest, funniest times have been when the whole family

4. See Marshall Sklare's classic study, *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier* (New York: Basic Books, 1967).

gets together for Passover. We pray, we sing, we laugh and we learn a little about Judaism.

Nothing I've done can compare with my family . . . sitting in the *Sukkah* on brisk Autumn evenings, or fasting together on Yom Kippur and running home to break the fast.

I enjoy sharing Passover and the High Holidays with my family. At these times I feel my life has been worthwhile.

Passover Seder with my family is always a warm, religious experience for me.

Among young people today, Jewish camping, youth groups, personalized study, and Israel stand out. These non-classroom approaches have positively engaged many young Jews. As one person noted,

I spent several summers at Camp Alonim during the early 1970s . . . I attended religious services weekly, and lectures daily. I felt like I had much more of a spiritual life than I have in secular society today.

Many of our respondents noted the impact of study with a rabbi. Others pointed to special encounters in Israel. Profound recollections included visiting the Western Wall, Masada, and Yad Vashem. A study participant remarked:

As a youth, I had an extremely positive Jewish experience which centered all of my current feelings about Judaism today. A summer in Israel endowed a positive feeling about Judaism for many years. I learned values and the soul of the religion.

An incredible 94% had something positive to report in their Jewish religious background. A mere 6% had nothing good to say. Yet, despite feeling generally positive about being Jewish, less than half of Los Angeles Jewry belong to a synagogue, and only 12% attend weekly *Shabbat* services.

The Inner Life

After probing our respondents' general Jewish identification, we turned to their inner feelings. We wanted to gauge the extent to which they reflect general American trends. In the United States today, "anything goes." You can believe in God or in nothing. You can get married, stay single, or get divorced. You can be childless or have children, and on, and on. There are few moral imperatives, little social pressure. You can do what you please.⁵

In response to this "anything goes" philosophy, some people today are increasingly seeking a moral vision — standards of right and wrong, models of morality. They want roots, commitments, meaning. In a word,

5. Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind — How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), pp. 78-79. My comments on the rise of the sacred today are based on this superlative book.

they yearn for *values*, life-preserving and life-enhancing values. Many have come to believe that there is no substitute for religion. A well ordered community needs a bit of ritual, a bit of "sacred space." For many, the sacred is seen as a basic need, like food or sex. Why? Because religion has a *comprehensive* value system, a way to make some sense out of the world.

I tested these hypotheses among our sample. They overwhelmingly (77%) believe that there is much more to life than what can be understood by those who believe only in the reality of the "material world." Over one-third believe that "religion is especially important because it answers questions about the meaning of life."

Jewish spirituality means a variety of things to our respondents. I asked them to define it. *Above all, our group defined spirituality as a value system.*

This thirst to comprehend the meaning of life was articulated by many, including one person who said:

Jewish spirituality is an additional dimension to those of space and time. Science can explain the workings of our physical science; [but] what force created our existence and what is our purpose and destiny? Jewish spirituality ascribes this force to God.

At the end of the study, the respondents were asked to describe the ideal Jewish setting, how their religious and spiritual needs could be better met. Many told us (47%) that they wished that they could become more spiritual persons. (See *Table*) Few (8%) commented that "it is too difficult to be a religious person and succeed in the world today." Most Jews are open to greater involvement.

Barriers to Observance

	Strongly Agree and Agree	Undecided	Strongly Disagree Disagree
1. I wish that I were a more spiritual person.	47%	24%	29%
2. I have felt close to God.	45%	26%	29%
3. I find my everyday experiences severely test my religious convictions,	24%	18%	58%
4. Religion is a means of escaping the reality of life.	16%	16%	68%
5. Religious ritual is usually cold and does not come from the heart.	12%	14%	74%
6. It is too difficult to be a religious person and succeed in the world today.	8%	13%	79%
7. I feel abandoned by God.	2%	12%	86%

The Robert Gordis Model

I have characterized American society as the “do your own thing” generation. Our respondents increasingly reject this philosophy. They want something religiously. They believe that there is more to life than “making it” socio-economically. They want a value system that helps them sort out the meaning of the world. They also yearn for an extended “family” of persons who stand for something important. We Jews have sought out science to tell us “how” the world works. Many now want answers to the question “What for?” Religion is best able to answer these “what for” questions. Consequently, young Jews, in larger and larger numbers, are turning to Judaism as a way of life.⁶ This return is, however, often taking place outside of our formal institutions and synagogues.

How should the organized Jewish community react to these “new Jews?” A parable can help us understand the remedy. Consider a gorgeous vase, a precious treasure owned by a family for many generations. It sits in a place of honor. During an earthquake, the vase falls and smashes into pieces. Each family member scrambles to pick up one piece and holds onto it as a reminder of the once magnificent vase.

Jewish life was once like the vase. Judaism was the life of Jews living as an *organic* community. It was whole. Serious Jews embraced the Jewish religion, the Jewish culture, and were committed to the survival of Jews throughout the world. After the Emancipation and Enlightenment, this organicity was broken. Instead of a “whole vase,” Jews picked up pieces of Judaism. Some became religious, concerned about spiritual issues. Others cultivated Jewish culture, Hebrew, Yiddish. Others defended Jewish rights, provided social services and maintained philanthropy. Each of these aspects of Judaism is necessary, but it is not sufficient. We must create a community of Jews which stands for all of these aspects of Jewish life. Our goal must be wholeness; fragmentation will not guarantee Jewish survival.⁷

This lesson was taught to me by my *rebbe*, Robert Gordis. Since 1970, Rabbi Gordis has been my intellectual mentor. In 1970, I was one of the young Jews in quest of spirituality, which I have described in this article. I grew up in squalor in Philadelphia. My divorced mother was too poor to provide me with a quality Jewish education. While in college, I enrolled in Dr. Gordis’ classes in the History of Judaism. That experience profoundly altered the course of my life.

Dr. Gordis was more than a teacher to me. He was a *mensch* —

6. Leonard Fein, *Where Are We? The Inner Life of America's Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 37-38.

7. On November 11, 1976, I heard Dr. Gordis address the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations on the theme, “The Broken Vase or Our Jewish Grandparents and Our Jewish Grandchildren.” I have modified his title for this essay to underline that we we must be even more pro-active today.

a caring, compassionate mentor. During personal and professional challenges over the last two decades, he was always there. It is because of him that I am a committed Jew. Dr. Gordis showed me models of how to reach out to this generation, a cohort of “new Jews.”

In this article, I have sketched these “new Jews.” Jews today come from weak Judaic backgrounds. They desperately seek a sense of community and a structured value system. Few find satisfaction for these needs in our conventional synagogues and organizations.

To reach these underinvolved Jews, we need more role models like Dr. Gordis. We require persons who, through their behavior and knowledge, can mentor fellow Jews. These religious mentors can make a significant impact. They can show others how you can be a serious Jew in today’s world, despite all the difficulties. Leo Baeck, the German rabbi, in 1920 wrote about the kind of mentors that we need today:

The message is not the sermon of the preacher, but the person himself. The person must be the message. The rabbi must not deliver a message. He must deliver himself.⁸

When I consider Dr. Gordis’ impact on me, I remember a Yiddish expression — “To a worm in horseradish, the whole world is horseradish.” If we do not know any other reality, we assume that the current set of circumstances is the only way to live. Jews today are in search of new realities. They yearn for more serious, intellectually satisfying Jewish experiences. They want to go beyond their current lifestyles. They seek a more enriching spiritual aspect to their Jewish lives.

To reach this generation, we must go beyond business as usual. We must not only be quality teachers, but quality mentors, like Robert Gordis. Jews are constantly seeking such personal relationships.

While in college, I often would put Dr. Gordis to the acid test and ask him, “Why be a Jew?” His response to me was the same one that he articulated in his writings and public speeches. He simply would quote the great French Jew, Bernard Lazare: “Being a Jew is the least difficult way of being truly human.” Many Jews today are making the same discovery.

8. Rabbi Joseph Glaser, quoted in the *Jewish Exponent*, October 16, 1987: 6 and 85.

Nun

SCHNEIR LEVIN

EARLY IN 1990, AN IDLE THOUGHT CROSSED my mind: the Hebrew letter *nun* has some connection with malaria — of which more presently.

Having thus been excited by this *nun*, I began to think about other *nun* matters: there was Joshua-bin-Nun (son of Nun), and here *nun* means a fish, it seems, at least in Aramaic, though it is difficult to see the relevance between an Aramaic word and the centuries-old Egyptian residence that is the Biblical source of Joshua's father's name. I have read that *nun* also meant fish in ancient Egypt.

And there was Jacob, *Ya'akov*, and how did a *nun* get into the patriarch's name in the nasalized *Yainkov* in Yiddish? Was this an affectionate diminutive? There were its further derivatives, *Yankel* and *Yankele*. But why not *Yakovel* as an affectionate derivative, rather than *Yankele*? There is no *Yakovel*, however, but there is certainly *Yainkov* and its derivatives Janks and Jankelovitz (Yankelovitch).

Any more? Well, how did the *nun* get into the pronunciation of *Yom tov* (lit. Day-good, or Holy day) to render it the Yiddish *Yontef*? And then there is my surname, Levin; whence the terminal *nun*? Certainly it is not an Aramaic source, and no Sephardi called Levi becomes Levin.

How to investigate? First, ask around, and second, consult a book on the origins of Yiddish.

In the process of asking around, rabbis and others reminded me of other *nun* peculiarities.

There is the *nun*, half-in, half-out,¹ in the Hebrew M-Sh-H of Judges 18:30, so that this name can be read either as Moshe or as Menashe (but not Menasseh!)

Not half out, but completely missing, is the *nun* verse in the alphabetic Psalm 145. Verse 13 begins with a *mem*, and verse 14, instead of beginning with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet, the initial *nun*, skips, instead, to the next alphabetic letter, a *samekh*. There is even an expected connecting idea missing between verses 13 and 14.

Enlarged (known as *rabbati*) letters are found scattered in the printed Pentateuchal text. An enlarged *rabbati nun* (in the word *nezer*) features in Exodus 34:7. In Ruth 3:13, the extended *nun* is in mid-word (*lini*),

1. The letter *ayin*, half-in, half-out, is found in Job 38:13.

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and a terminal *rabbati nun* concludes the word *mishpatan* in Numbers 27:5.

A bizarre *nun*, *rabbati*, upside down and directionally reversed, introduces verses 23-28,40 of Psalm 107 in the older printed (as in pre-War Vilna) Pentateuch. Two enlarged, upside down and mirror image *nuns*, rather like brackets, and perhaps intended as such, envelop verses 35 and 36 of chapter 10 of Numbers. It seems a kind of signal that this couplet doesn't belong here. In addition, the couplet is also encased within a *samekh*, and thereafter, a *peh*, both these letters being scattered throughout the Pentateuch — in its printed version, not the hand-written scroll. The *samekh*, sometimes in triplicate, supposedly stands for *satum*, closed, termination, and the *peh* — often in triplicate — for *patuah*, open, beginning (a new section or paragraph).

Genesis 11:32 seems innocent enough, but Rashi comments that, in his copy of the Pentateuch, the *nun* in the concluding word, *Haran*, is reversed.

Hebrew evidently finds the *nun* to be a weak letter, and readily drops it, and there are many examples of words such as *nafal* (fell) which, in the completed (past) tense become *vayipol*, and he fell, with the *nun* dropped. Similar is *nashak* (kiss) and *vayishak*, *nashakh* (bite) and *vayishakh*, *nagash* (approach) and *vayigash* — the *nun* falls.

Sometimes other letters suffer this fate, e.g. *lakah* (take), *vayikah*, and he took but with the *l* (*lamed*) dropped; *halakh* (walked, went) and *vayelekh*, with the *h* (*heh*) dropped.

If a *nun* is dropped there may be a signal that such has happened in the form of a *dagesh*, a dot, placed within the earlier *nun*, such as in *hanani* (contraction of *hanan-ni*; God “has been gracious to me”) of Genesis 33:11.

Hebrew is not fond of the final, pluralizing *yod-nun* (“in” in English) of Aramaic words (and Levin is not Aramaic; it is as Russian as Lenin, Stalin, Kalinin), though it may retain them in special circumstances, such as the Hebrew-Aramaic hybrid *huppah ve'kiddushin*, marriage and consecration.

Hebrew also drops the *nun* from other, earlier, Aramaic words so that the Aramaic *ant* (you) becomes the Hebrew *at* (feminine) or *atah* (masculine). The Aramaic *bant* (Arabic *bint*, daughter) is shortened to the Hebrew *bat*. The Hebrew *isha* (woman) presents special problems because its plural is not the expected *ishot* but the altogether bizarre *nashim* (where a *nun* is added!), and there is clearly some connection with the Hebrew *enosh* (man), *anashim* (men) and the Aramaic *insha* (woman). The archaic Hebrew of the Book of Job retains an unexpected *nun* in the word *minhem* (from them; Job 11:20) instead of the usual Hebrew usage which drops the *nun* in favour of *mihem*. An odd situation is present in Job 40:6, where the terminal *nun* in the word *min* (from) is written as an ordinary *nun*. Moreover, in Biblical Hebrew this *nun*

should have been elided in favor of the connected word *mi'sa'arah* (from a whirlwind). In Lamentations 1:6 *min-bat-Zion* (from the daughter of Zion) has a *kri* ("to be read as") asterisk of *mibat-Zion*.

With this background, clearly one is entitled to be puzzled by the insertion of the unpopular *nun* into *Ya'akov*. How could Hebrew tolerate a *Yainkov* even if it did leave Hebrew for Yiddish? Most people I asked didn't know the answer. Without exception, every rabbi I asked, and some of my friends, explained that the *Yainkov* is the equivalent of the Sephardi pronunciation, with its peculiar accentuation of the *ayin*, the second consonant, so that this *ayin* gives a hint of possibly, only just possibly, also having a *nun* sound attached. Perhaps the rabbis were so emphatic on the basis of the statement in the *Shulhan Arukh* (*Orah Haim* 53:12) that a *hazan* (cantor) must pronounce the *ayin* correctly, and since the Ashkenazim couldn't duplicate the correct *ayin* sound, it sounded more like a *nun*.

This explanation I could not accept. After all, what contact did European Jews, and Yiddish, and Hebrew, for that matter, have with Sephardim and their pronunciation? They still don't copy Sephardi nuances, even in Israel. They say *nosan* (gave) instead of the Sephardi *natan*, *zos* (this) instead of *zot*, so why copy the Sephardi *Ya'akov*? But local rabbis and friends remained satisfied with their explanation. After some months, I wrote to a scholar and editor in Jerusalem, and received the same Sephardi-copying explanation.

So I looked into Max Weinreich's *History of the Yiddish Language*,² and found a different explanation: "The combination of *patah* (*ah* sound) and *hataf-patah* (*ih* and *ah* combination) leads to nasalization, for example in *Yankov* (Jacob), *mayse* (tale) . . ." This is equally unsatisfactory, because why *mayse* and not *maynse*? He gives no other examples of a nasalized *nun* creeping in, and gives no indication of why, when and where this *nun* intrusion took place.

Finally, toward the end of 1990, I decided that I was looking and asking in the wrong quarters, so I did what had been done with the mirror image *nun*; I reversed my thinking and approached an authority on Russian (H. Mondry), of the Department of Russian at the local university and, moreover, one having lived in Israel and also familiar with Hebrew.

In my letter of inquiry, I asked to have light thrown on a problem which "on the surface is a Hebrew problem but, I suspect . . . is basically a Russian issue." I mentioned that Hebrew is not unique in its tendency to drop a weak "n", and that Portuguese does the same, so that the Latin *trans* becomes *tras*, and the Latin *luna* becomes *lua*. I surmised that Russian has the opposite tendency, a love of the *nun*, so that *Yomtov* becomes *Yontov* and Levin (instead of Levi) becomes readily acceptable.

2. Shlomo Noble, tr. (University of Chicago Press, 1980).

I mentioned a local friend called Shelley who recently visited her aged aunt in Vilna, Lithuania, and was there affectionately called *Shellinke*. I concluded my letter with the thought that *Ya'akov* didn't progress to *Yainkov* and thereafter to *Yankel* and *Yankele*, but the reverse: during the past few hundred years an affectionate diminutive, *Yankele* (like *Shellinke*), or *Yankel*, was given as a name to Jewish boys, and this in turn forced itself into *Yainkov*, in an effort to legitimize itself Hebraically.

The reply I got (from H. Mondry) was very helpful: *Yankele* or *Yankel* had its origin, perhaps, in the western Slavic and, indeed, European name Jan (John).

Of course! Now things started to make sense. Jewish acculturation in Europe has a long history. My own first name, Schneir, is Spanish (from Señor or Señor); my brother's name, Haim, sounds very Hebrew, but derives from the 13th century Spanish Jaime, pronounced Haime and hence Hymie. Jan is ubiquitous in Europe, and in Holland the diminutive is Janke. Here, in the South African Afrikaans tongue, the diminutive is pronounced *Yainke*. In the USA it is Yankee.

And, so, Hebrew gave way to a European tongue via Yiddish. Now the Yiddish *Yente* and *Yentel* also become clear. Weinreich doesn't give its origin, but says that it is very old and derives from *Lo'ez*, a Romance root related to Italian, Spanish and French. In that case, I suggest, *Yente* derives from *Juanita*.

Is it possible that *Yontov* was originally a name, *Jan-tov* (Jan-good) and, because of assonance, eased its way into the Hebrew *Yomtov*? There were Jews in Europe, as early as the 12th century, called *Yomtov*; was this a consequence of an earlier Gentile-Hebrew *Jan-tov*? Did the name then persist in Yiddish as the equivalent of the Hebrew *Yomtov* (Holy day)?

Judaism is very strict when it comes to writing names for marriage (*huppah ve'kiddushin*) and especially so for divorce (*get*). Many Jews don't know their Hebrew names, and so, on a *ketubah* (marriage certificate) the English (or other language) letters are written in the nearest Hebrew equivalents, but in a *get* no chances are taken, and every conceivable alias is also written down, from Amanda to Zane, in Hebrew equivalents, to *Yentel* to *Yankel* to *Yainkov* if *Ya'akov* has not been definitely established as the correct name.

We return now to the original problem from which I was diverted by *nun* in and out of other places: the *nun* and malaria, and a hint has already been supplied in the word *huppah*. It suddenly struck me, one day, that the Hebrew word, *huppah*, which actually means wedding canopy, derives from the same source as its English equivalent, canopy, and that the Hebrew *huppah* must have had an Aramaic origin like *hunppah*, from which the *nun* was dropped.

A quick referral to Jastrow's dictionary of Aramaic and to other sources confirmed my guess — or so it seemed, at first. *Huppah*, as

a verb, is used to mean cover or veil (2 Sam. 15:30, 2 Kings 17:9, 2 Chron. 3:5, Jer. 14:3,4, Ps. 68:13; but see v. 14 in the Hebrew, Esther 7:8) and as a noun, a protective covering (Isa. 4:5). In Joel 2:16 the covering is specifically for a bride, and in Ps. 19:6 (v. 5 in the Hebrew) for a groom. *Huppah* is also the name of a person (1 Chron. 24:13), as in *Huphim* (Gen. 46:21).

But the root *hanaf*, in Aramaic, means precisely the same: veil, covering, concealment. In Jer. 23:15 the word *hanuppah* refers to deceit, and, in modern Hebrew, *hanuppah* has retained a negative image: deceit, insincere flattery, hypocrisy, cover-up, undercover.

It seems possible then, if not likely, that the Hebrew *huppah*, cover, derives from the Aramaic *hanuppah*. Is this word *hanuppah* related to the English canopy?

This English word derives from the ancient Greek *konopeon*. Does *konopeon* have an Aramaic source? Perhaps not, on the basis that the Hebrew letter *het*, *h*, would be reflected in the Greek *chi*, *ch*, rather than the *kappa*, *k*. But the Aramaic *canaf* (or *kanaf*), also means, as in Hebrew, covering, wing, and herein there is a source of confusion and perhaps synthesis between *canaf* and *hanuppah*.

Is *konopeon* derived from either *canaf* or *hanuppah*? Evidence is lacking. *Konopeon* is probably not an original Greek word, being used only half a dozen times in ancient Greek literature (and not at all in Homer), and notably in the apocryphal Book of Judith, where it is written that the Persian (a cover-up for Greek-Syrian!) General, Holofernes, slept under a veil, a mosquito net (10:21, 13:9). The ancient Greek for mosquito or gnat is *konops*.

If *konops*, *konopeon*, did not originate from a common source with Hebrew, from Aramaic, could it have derived from elsewhere? Bernal³ has suggested to me an alternative possibility: malaria-ridden Egypt. In the ancient western Egyptian Delta, there was an important textile and weaving center called *Kanopos*, possibly derived from *ka-Anubis*, the spirit-dwelling of the jackal-god, *Anubis*. In that region they made curtains and covers for beds, a protection against the *konops*, the mosquito, and against their endemic malaria.

But is it also simply an etymological accident that *konopeon* and *hanuppah* are so closely related in sound and, especially, meaning? Has a common Aramaic derivation been lost during the passage of the millennia? When the bride and groom stand under the *huppah* while their marriage is solemnized, are they in a tiny representation of their future home, or are they uniting under a mosquito net lest they be bitten and contract malaria?

3. Martin G. Bernal, of Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, is the author of *Black Athena*, dealing with the Egyptian origins of Greek words and ideas.

The Future of Anti-Semitism

FRANKLIN H. LITTELL

THE MASKS THAT HIDE THE UGLY FACE OF anti-Semitism are increasing in number. Yet, certain themes remain constant, and under the surface they survive over long periods of time and in apparently hostile waters. It has been dismaying to many to see that, after seventy years of avowedly scientific education, after three generations of education and indoctrination in criticism of superstition, after seven decades of intensive revolutionary efforts to root out irrationality and prejudice, anti-Semitism is still alive and well in Soviet Russia.

For some of us, professing Christians, it has been especially dismaying to realize that one of the worst aspects of traditional Christianity has survived during the years when our co-believers have wintered through the frozen years of Bolshevik dictatorship and repression. As the thaw sets in, anti-Semitism is again emerging as a powerful popular force.

Traditional anti-Semitism

For a thousand years, the poets and theologians of Mother Russia praised her identity as the carrier of Christian civilization, of true Orthodox Christianity. When Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, Moscow became the dominant center of Christendom as the Orthodox faithful understood it.

No one can understand the triumphant, victorious, overpowering resonance of Tchaikowsky's *1812 Overture* unless he realizes that it was written to celebrate that watershed event when the armies of Holy Russia threw back the forces of "the Anti-Christ" (Napoleon) from the gates of the "Third Rome" of Christian history in Russian Orthodox eyes.

Such is the power of a myth! We make a serious mistake if we think that overt anti-Semitism — intentional, calculated use of anti-Semitism as a political tool or weapon — is the most serious dimension of the disease. Modern anti-Semitism, racial and nationalist and populist, moves to the center of the stage only when its proponents are in power. Across nearly two millennia, the most serious dimensions of anti-Semitism have been theological and cultural. Only for the last century or so has political anti-Semitism appeared on the stage. It started when Wilhelm Marr invented the word and developed its political uses,

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when, after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, the Russian rulers used the pogrom to divert the people's attention from their real problems.

The rapid expansion of Biblical and Patristic studies in the post-Auschwitz era has made us all aware of the extent to which early gentile Christians defined their identity by use of pejoratives toward the continuing Jewish people. The assertions of the affirmative litany have grown familiar: the religion of Love replaces the religion of Law, the New Israel replaces the Old Israel as the carrier of history, the New Covenant supersedes the Old Covenant, the Hebrew Scriptures ("Old Testament") can be understood only through the glass of the New Testament . . .

The negative litany is of equally deadly import: with the gift of Jesus of Nazareth to the nations, the historical mission of the Jews is fulfilled; the destruction of the Second Temple gives direct evidence of God's wrath that a majority of Jesus' countrymen rejected him; the Jews are to disappear into the dustbin of history, not even surviving as a "Semitic fossil" (to use Arnold Toynbee's anti-Semitic term). When it became evident that the Jews were not disappearing, Augustine of Hippo elaborated a hostile explanation: God allowed them to survive as a negative lesson. Suffering, persecuted, wandering, and homeless, they showed what happens to a people when it misses the turn in the road, bypasses the moment of decision.

With the founding of the Christian Roman Empire under Constantine the Great (274-337), and especially with the imperial codebooks issued by Theodosius II (401-50) and Justinian (483-565), "Christendom" was established. The repression of "Jews and heretics" became a political and religious duty of all faithful rulers. By the time of the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE), when the theologians had defined Jesus as one with the Father and truly God, the deicide calumny had become a deadly weapon in the arsenal of Christian apologists.

During the centuries of "Christendom," a second layer was laid on the level of theological anti-Semitism: cultural anti-Semitism. Eventually, words and phrases and caricatures of "the Jew" were repeated by persons without conscious malice, including such eminent humanists as William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens.

Let me relate two stories which show the way in which traditional theological and cultural anti-Semitism are mixed in the mindset of "Christendom."

Traditional Anti-Semitism in Russia

The last Tsar, Nicholas Romanov, had his rule reinforced by officers using anti-Semitism as a modern tool of politics. One of the Tsar's representatives in the Second Duma commented, after the Kishinev po-

grom, that they had prevented a revolution by throwing the Jews to the mob. The Tsar's constitutional adviser, Konstantin Pobyedonostzev, persecuted Jews and Christian minorities vigorously. He was author of the infamous anti-Semitic formula: one third will convert, one third will be killed, and one third will be driven into exile. For our present purposes, we should remember that he was the presiding officer of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church.

During the pogroms, a Russian officer appealed to Tsar Nicholas to stop the cruelty and bloodshed. We have his note on the officer's letter, thanks to the opening of the archives at the time of the 1917 revolution. He scribbled in the margin of the letter: "But after all, they did crucify our Lord!"

Traditional Anti-Semitism in Germany

I shall not forget the shock that came to me when I found documentation of a similar mix of theological and cultural anti-Semitism in the thinking of Bishop Otto Dibelius of the Church Berlin-Brandenburg (A.P.U.).

Dibelius was truly a great man — an opponent of the Nazis' attempt to take over and manipulate the churches, later an opponent of the Communist regime in East Germany, an ecumenical leader of stature in the *Kirchentag* and the World Council of Churches after the war. I knew him well during my decade in the American occupation of post-War Germany, and later as a visitor in my home in the United States.

While doing research after he was dead, I discovered a letter which he wrote to this preachers in the Kurmark in 1937, when he was Superintendent, in anticipation of their preaching during the Lenten season. This was after the German Jews had been robbed of their citizenship and their protection at law. Dibelius wrote with scorn of the street-fighting, gutter politics of the Nazis and their vulgar anti-Semitism. And then he wrote, "Of course I have always considered myself a theological anti-Semite . . ." He went on to urge the use of Good Friday and Easter as special occasions to preach conversion to the Jews and salvation only through Jesus Christ.

Otto Dibelius was, I repeat, a good man — learned, a gentleman of the old school, a man whose self-respect would never allow him to mix socially with the rabble that infested the Nazi Party nor to approve their violent politics. Yet, as a theological conservative, he could only repeat what the churches — Orthodox, Latin and Protestant — had taught and preached for uncounted generations.

In a certain sense, Dr. Dibelius' call to evangelize the Jews was an act of defiance in 1937, for the Nazi regime had already ordered the churches to abandon "non-Aryan" Christians," and was taking stern measures against "non-Aryan" pastors and priests. But, of course, as

Wolfgang Gerlach's splendid study of the Confessing Church has shown,¹ even the opposition of the best and brightest was too feeble. In the Barmen Declaration, they marshalled an impressive stand against the idolatry of the *Fuehrerstaat*, and theologian Karl Barth and Pastor Martin Niemöller and their loyalists performed well in defense of the integrity of the Church. On "the Jewish issue" (*Judenfrage*), as they called it, only Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Wilhelm Visscher saw the relationship of the ethical issue to the theological. Visscher died in exile and Bonhoeffer died a martyr.

German Anti-Semitism Today

The reunification of Germany has naturally set off alarm signals among those people who suffered the most from Germany in World War II, notably the Poles and the Jews. While not all Jews, nor even all Israelis, would agree with Prime Minister Shamir's harsh statement about continuing German guilt, many survivors have expressed articulate uneasiness. Will a reunited Germany threaten the peace of Europe again? Perhaps more to the point, will a reunited Germany so dominate the European economy and political scene that it may threaten world peace again?

What are the signs of chauvinism, militarism and political anti-Semitism in Germany? Neo-Nazi literature does circulate in Germany today. Perhaps we should notice that the traffic is illegal, and that most of the materials are translated into German and shipped from Lincoln, Nebraska. There have been several efforts to organize a *revanche*-oriented neo-Nazi political thrust. But, in dealing with groups not in good faith in the political forum, Germany has developed one of the best Early Warning Systems in the world today. Disloyal individuals, groups and movements that demonstrate that they are outside the political covenant, can be found "against the Constitution" according to due process of law, declared "*verfassungswidrig*," and suppressed.

No school system in the world has a more complete set of relevant textbooks and courses than the German Federal Republic, where, for some years, all *Gymnasium* students have been instructed and examined on "Dictatorship and Democracy: Lessons of the Third Reich," "Anti-Semitism," "The Holocaust," and "The Jewish Contribution to German History and Culture." And no political leader in the West has taken a stronger or more principled stand than President Richard von Weizsäcker — including personal intervention in a decisive way on such specific issues as Bitburg, the *Historikerstreit* and affirmation of support for Israel.

The problem of anti-Semitism in Germany, now that there is little

1. Wolfgang Gerlach, *Als die Zeugen schwiegen: Bekennende Kirche und die Juden* (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1987), *passim*.

chance that willful, cunning and deliberately wicked anti-Semites may come back into power, is the fact that it is still thriving at the theological and cultural levels. This is true even though the most advanced statement on converting Christian preaching and teaching away from its traditional hostility to the Jewish people has been taken by several German Protestant churches² during the last decade.

The statement of the flagship church, the Church of the Rhineland, is so important that the points of emphasis should be carefully noted. After several years of study, they voted by a proportion of 8 to 1 that a new relationship to the Jewish people was essential because of —

- (a) The recognition of Christian co-responsibility and guilt for the Holocaust — the defamation, persecution, and murder of Jews in the Third Reich.
- (b) The new Biblical insights concerning the continuing significance of the Jewish people for salvation history (e.g., Rom. 9–11), which have been attained in connection with the Church Struggle.
- (c) The insight that the continuing existence of the Jewish people, its return to the Land of Promise, and also the creation of the State of Israel, are signs of the faithfulness of God toward God's people . . .
- (d) The readiness of Jews, in spite of the Holocaust, to [engage in] encounter, common study, and cooperation.

I remember quite vividly the personal testimony of a leading member of the German parliament (*Bundestag*) to a group of us who accompanied Elie Wiesel to Berlin several years ago, to talk about the way in which the new National Museum of the German People should interpret the years 1933–45. He — Peter Petersen — told of his personal crisis when he realized how the national leadership had betrayed his trust as a youthful *Hitlerjugend* and soldier, and he said that “anyone who has confronted the Holocaust will never be the same person again.”

No, the problem in Germany is not primarily political. Even if it were a serious issue, the coming of a United Europe will take care of such deficiencies. The problem lies deeper. What is the depth of ingrained anti-Semitism that leads the authorities in Oberammergau resolutely to refuse to change the bad text which they were intent on using for the Passion Play this past summer, even featuring in a central place and accent the maledictory words, “Let His blood be on us and on our children!”? After several years of negotiations and hard work by Roman Catholic scholars, like my colleagues Leonard Swidler and Gerard Sloyan, they still will not budge. Nor will the Bavarian Catholic authorities so instruct them.

What is to be the mythic significance of *November 9* in days and

2. The flagship judicatory statement was that of the Synod of the Protestant Church of the Rhineland, which has been followed by some others. See my translation, “Toward Renovation of the Relationship of Christians and Jews,” XVII, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (1980) 1:211–12.

years to come? Throughout the two Germanies, and among friendly peoples around the world, November 9th is being celebrated and written about again and again as “the day the Wall came down.” I was in Berlin on August 7, 1961 — when the Wall went up — and I share the general euphoria.

But there were other November 9ths in German history. What is to become of them? *Item*: the hours when World War I ended in disaster for the Imperial German Empire. *Item*: the hours when the disloyal Nazis and their immediate allies attempted, in Munich, in the so-called Beer Hall Putsch, to overthrow the Weimar Republic. *Item*: the days when a Nazi Party-inspired and Nazi Party-directed pogrom (the so-called *Kristallnacht*) destroyed 200 synagogues, over 700 Jewish businesses, took 20,000 Jewish men to concentration camps, and levied a one billion RM fine upon the already disfranchised German Jewish community.

The date of *Kristallnacht* is important for Holocaust education, for on this signal day the lessons of the Holocaust can be lifted up to attention and learning, while at *Yom Hasho'ah* the only appropriate exercise calls for prayer, meditation and remembrance. Human history is ambiguous, paradoxical, bitter-sweet. It is a dangerous thing to open the way to forgetfulness about important historical events and their lessons — in this instance, especially dangerous to open the way to euphoric national myths about November 9, 1989 that may allow the remembering of November 9, 1918 and November 9, 1923 and November 9, 1938 to slip into oblivion.

Russian Anti-Semitism Today

In Russia today, we find a myth-making process at work that may have far more dangerous consequences than the Soviet Union's temporary capitulation to the terrorism of the Arab League, far more dangerous than the resurgence of populist (*voelkisch*) anti-Semitism in Russia — which we see as well in France, Austria and Romania.

Pamyat, with its reactionary politics (including anti-Semitism), was the first organized effort to twist the movement in Russia toward greater liberty, initiative and self-government in the direction of an assault on Russian Jewry. More recently, there has been a report of a federation of five anti-Semitic groupings into something called “the People's Russian Christian Orthodox Movement.” This federation has a political formation and also a membership organization within the armed forces.

The development is symptomatic of two dangerous elements in modern anti-Semitism, here combined. On the one hand, there is the populist base, the appeal to “the will of the people.” In this century, every evil force, including every dictator from Stalin and Hitler to Assad and Ghadafi, has found it necessary to claim popular support and to

devise means to arouse it or simulate it. We must not forget that the German Nazi Party was a populist (*voelkisch*) movement. In the last open election, those voting for the NSDAP lists were on the average ten years younger than those voting for Wels and the Social Democrats, Heuss and the Liberals, Hugenberg and the Conservatives ...

Alexis de Tocqueville wrote of "democracies that are not free." Jacob Talmon wrote of "totalitarian democracy." Kurt Leibholz, the brother-in-law of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, already in 1933 perceived that the Nazis could not build a legitimate government even though they enjoyed widespread popular support, because they were deficient in the second — and no less important — mark of a legitimate government, which is respect for the rights of loyal oppositions.

The second dangerous element in the upsurge of Russian populism today is the appeal to an archaic and powerful myth, the resuscitation of the myth of a Russian Christian Orthodox Empire — monolithic and monochromatic, and, by definition, anti-Semitic. The Jews, already demonized in scientific fiction and politically suspect because of years of anti-Zionist propaganda, are thrust outside of the social and political covenant of mutual concern.

The Russian Christian Orthodox Empire, with a savage record also against Orthodox "Old Believers," against Doukhobers, against Menonites, was for centuries one of the least lovely and most persecuting of all expressions of Constantinian "Christendom." The reversion to that vision of a Christian Orthodox Empire, a vision being promoted by some of those most courageous in opposition to the Marxist dictatorship while it lasted, can set the whole future of the peoples of the USSR upon a course as false and destructive as the one from which they are freeing themselves so ardently.

Only slightly below the surface is the charge that this brief interruption in the history of Holy Russia, this interregnum of seventy years of basically non-Russian ideas and power-structures, was initiated by "the Jews." In other countries of East Europe, too, there is danger that populist movements, allied with anachronistic visions of *voelkisch* identity, may be as fatal to the security of Jewish minorities as were such passionate political dreams during the German Third Reich.

And in the United States?

Fortunately, the powerlessness that was so fatal to Jews trapped in Hitler's *Festung Europa*, and which is so dangerous to Jews (and also Armenian Christians) in the highly volatile political scene in the Soviet Union today, is not characteristic of Jewry in the United States.

Nevertheless, there are real signs of danger, a danger that runs far deeper than such vulgar and overt scandals as overturned cemetery stones, defaced fronts of synagogues, David Duke and Louis Farrakhan.

Since 1967, there has been a radical deformation and re-formation of political alliances in America — in several sectors disadvantageous to the Jewish community.

Take the black churches. During the fight to get a loyal enforcement of the Constitutional rights of black citizens, there was a strong alliance between the black political leaders — many of them ministers — and the leaders of the Jewish defense agencies. That alliance has collapsed, as the quest for economic justice has moved to the front of the stage. Martin Luther King, Jr. — who was always dependable on issues such as Israel's wellbeing and combatting anti-Semitism — has been replaced by Jesse Jackson as the most charismatic and politically influential representative of the black churches.

Moreover, the black pulpit is no longer the only ladder to power and prestige for upward-mobile black citizens. Fellowships for black students to attend seminaries go begging today. The ideas and self-definitions have changed with the social and economic and political scenes. Two generations ago, some of the greatest preachers in America were holding forth on the Exodus and other basic paradigms from the Hebrew Scriptures ("Old Testament"). Today, if they haven't gone over to the Black Muslims, most young blacks with personal élan and verbal facility are as secularized in their thinking as are the whites.

Take the liberal "mainline" Protestant denominations. For some time soft to "Third World" orientations, many of the local congregations have recently become echo chambers for PLO propaganda and Israel-bashing. Now I know very well that not every church voice that criticizes Israel has been reached by PLO propaganda, although its printed and organizational channels are widespread throughout those denominations that are most prominent in the National Council of Churches. But, remembering the depth of the roots of cultural and theological anti-Semitism in the churches, I know that "only he that draws the knife shall win Isaac," and only the Christian who has taken the knife to his own prejudices is on his way to emancipation from instinctive anti-Semitism.

Take Rosemary Ruether's book, *The Wrath of Jonah*, now circulating in the churches in a beautiful volume printed by Harper & Row. This is one of the most viciously partisan tracts to appear in the "Palestinian" cause in the English language. Christians who support Israel's survival and wellbeing are dismissed as "Fundamentalists" — including the National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel, a federation of Roman Catholics, liberal Protestants and conservative Protestants of which I was a co-founder and have the honor to be permanently listed as President Emeritus.

The Ruether tract is not only promoted through the "liberal" denominations: she had been chosen as a key leader of the summer conference of one of the three leading Protestant journals (*Christianity and*

Crisis). As ironical and disturbing as the descent of the black churches from Martin Luther King Jr. to Jesse Jackson, is the fact that *Christianity and Crisis* was founded years ago by Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the great champions of the Jewish people. His articles in February of 1942, entitled "The Jews After the War," were the first Christian advocacy of a Jewish homeland as the only practical solution to the Jewish plight in this kind of world.³ He was also the first American theologian publicly to repudiate targeting the Jews for missionary work.

The year 1967 was the turning point.⁴ The large, liberal churches — some of whose prominent leaders had supported the American Christian Palestine Committee and mobilized political action for the young state's survival in 1948 and 1956 — suddenly became aware that "the Jew" was no longer powerless, homeless, wandering, a loser. In a matter of but a few months, they began to pass resolutions in support of "the poor Palestinians," and to open their channels of communication to the PLO and Arab League propaganda.

The year 1967 was the turning point, also, for significant blocs of conservative Protestants. Influenced by the theology of John Nelson Darby (1800-82), the teaching of the Niagara Bible Prophecy Conferences (held annually from 1876), the educational work of dozens of Bible Schools and Bible Colleges, they suddenly saw in Israel's smashing victory in the Six Day War events predictive of the restoration of Solomon's Kingdom and the coming Armageddon of the nations. Having lived and worked quietly in the land, the "dispensationalists" burst forth with dozens of radio and TV programs all across North America.

In none of these three corners can the Jewish leaders or communities take much comfort today. And, while the Roman Catholic Church in America has followed Vatican II in eliminating much of the traditional anti-Semitic teachings in the liturgy and the catechism, very little progress can be reported to date in Catholic affirmation of Jewish survival and Israel's well-being.

In Sum

Without criticizing the leadership of Jewish defense agencies, let me say that both the Jewish communal leadership and the Christian communal leadership have a long way to go before we have read out all the lessons of our common history in America and pointed up the direction of our common future.

Religious Liberty is a far more demanding principle than toleration — which was the best of hopes in European Christendom. In Amer-

3. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Jews After the War," *The Nation* (February 21, 28, 1942), vol. 154: 214-16, 253-55.

4. Franklin H. Littell, *American Protestantism and Antisemitism* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1985), *passim*.

ica, "Christians" and "gentiles" are two different entities — a fact that has enormous political as well as religious significance. Beyond affirming and defending the Religious Liberty that is so rare in the world and so vital to the well-being of our respective communities and our pluralistic society, we have yet to come to terms with the two most important events of recent centuries: the Holocaust and a restored Israel.

We all know that there are many American Jews who are just as deaf to the story and the lessons of the Holocaust, and blind to the glory that is there in a restored Israel, as there are deaf and blind among the gentiles (including, to date, most of the Christians).

We shall make progress together only as those who are vital minorities in our communities, which are, in turn, vital minorities within the larger body politic that is the United States of America, band together in new alliances of mutual concern. To the extent that we do so, we shall secure not only the future of our children and grandchildren but also position ourselves to champion our persecuted and endangered brethren in Soviet Russia and Eastern Europe, Israel, Latin America and North America, and elsewhere on this shrinking globe.

Franz Rosenzweig, Objective Truth and the Personal Standpoint

MICHAEL L. MORGAN

AFTER CLEARING AWAY THE REDUCTIVE ERRORS of the "old thinking," of traditional metaphysical philosophy, in the first part of *The Star of Redemption*, Franz Rosenzweig introduces his new method of philosophical inquiry, the "new thinking," and proceeds to employ it to arrive at a new philosophical understanding of the human condition.¹ This is the project of the second part of *The Star*.² But, at a crucial juncture, Rosenzweig stops to acknowledge a fundamental problem about his new method. Let me try to spell out, in my own way, the gist of this problem, and then show how Rosenzweig claims to solve it. I want to focus on this solution, for it is not at all clear what Rosenzweig means by it, and how it is intended to accomplish its task.

The problem that Rosenzweig identifies is one that could not have arisen prior to Montaigne and Descartes, for it requires a certain conception of selfhood and the role of personal experience in philosophical inquiry. The problem is about the objectivity or transcendence of philosophical thought. As long as the philosopher engages in his inquiry from an impersonal or disengaged point of view, then his results can claim to be objectively true. They are not prejudiced or biased by the individual, even personal features of the philosopher's situation. The philosopher's arguments and proposals and conclusions are carried out by him in a general and non-particular way. Like the scientist, the philosopher conducts himself *qua* rational inquirer, analyst, and so forth. And this conception of the objectivity of philosophical thinking is a feature of virtually all such thinking prior to the late 16th and early

1. Not all students of Rosenzweig's work appreciate that he employs the new thinking, subjective or speech thinking, only in the second part of *The Star*. In the first part, he uses the old philosophical method to indict itself. For the error of wondering how the new thinking can, in Part One, result in abstract outcomes, i.e., God, Man, and World, see Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 376-77.

2. References to *The Star of Redemption* will be to the German edition, Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988), which is a reprint of the Martinus Nijhoff edition of 1976. The only current English translation is by William Hallo, published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston in 1970. Sections of *The Star* are available in Nahum Glatzer (ed.), *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (Schocken, 1953).

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17th centuries. For, until there arises a rich notion of a deeply inward and reflexive self, it makes little sense to treat the experiences of such a self as constitutive of philosophical thought. In short, traditional philosophical thinking, from Plato and Aristotle to Aquinas, Maimonides, and on through Hobbes, Locke, Leibniz, and further, is always an attempt to understand nature, God, man, and more, from a detached, impersonal, and, hence, objective perspective. This is what Thomas Nagel has recently called the “view from nowhere.”³

But with the rise of a new conception of the self, and the centrality of the self's first person perspective or point of view, there arises the possibility that philosophical thinking may not begin with this impersonal and objective perspective, and, hence, never attain universality and truth. That is, there is the risk that a philosophical thinking that began as the first person experience of the philosopher *qua* particular individual might never transcend that limited, subjective, perspectival posture. It might never, that is, arrive at objectivity and general truth. Hence, it might not yield general results and need never be accepted by others, for they might treat its results as the limited outcomes of one person's thinking, and that is all.⁴

This problem is precisely the one that Rosenzweig acknowledges and seeks to confront. In other words, he registers his criticisms of the old thinking but admits its virtue, that its claim to be “scientific” and objective was convincing. If, indeed, its results were true, then they were universally and objectively true. His criticism is that they are reductionist, and, hence, false. But when he proposes his new method, “speech thinking” or “absolute empiricism,” he realizes that if its results are true, they may nonetheless not be objectively true but only, as it were, “idiosyncratically” true. If this were so, then the loss might be greater than the gain. In the place of a few erroneous routes, Rosenzweig would find himself with a virtually infinite number of true ones. Surely this is one sense of Rosenzweig's fear of the curse of historicity.⁵

Rosenzweig's way of putting this problem is this:

Is it possible, still, to call this new thinking science? Can the term science be applied to a method that surveys each thing by itself, in its countless relations and from its multiple perspectives? Shall a survey whose unity

3. Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

4. Rosenzweig calls the new philosopher “the philosopher of the *Weltanschauung*” and indicates that the question whether his philosophy is still science is a question addressed by Nietzsche (*Der Stern*, 117; *Hallo*, 105).

5. The problem that Rosenzweig faces, then, is a problem for all philosophical thinking that proceeds by following the experience and understanding of the engaged, situated agent. Hence, it is the problem that Hegel succeeds in solving by showing how a plethora of perspectival accounts accumulate and culminate in an absolute standpoint, the philosophical standpoint. It is also a problem for Schelling's positive philosophy, for Kierkegaard, and later figures in the existential tradition.

can at best reside within the surveyor — and how dubious is even that!— still be passed off as science? (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, 117; Hallo, 105-6).

Rosenzweig is convinced that philosophy cannot return to its old ways: those ways lead to deep and pervasive difficulties.

[Philosophy] must cling to her new point of departure, to the subjective, extremely personal, unique self, absorbed in itself and the standpoint of self, and still attain to the objectivity of science. Where is the bridge to connect extreme subjectivity, one might even say, deaf and blind subjectivity, with the luminous clearness of infinite objectivity?⁶

Implicitly, Rosenzweig refuses two alternatives. The philosopher cannot collapse the subjective into the objective or the objective into the subjective. To do the former is to lapse into the old thinking, already discredited; to do the latter is to sink into subjectivism, if not outright solipsism. The task is somehow to bridge the gap between the non-reducible first person point of view that characterizes the philosopher's thinking and the completely general and compelling objectivity that his thinking aspires to achieve. How, indeed, can the very same thinking be both subjective and objective at once? This is Rosenzweig's problem, and it is, indeed, a central one, for if he fails to solve it, then the remainder of *The Star* becomes at best an attractive story, the account of one person's thinking and not a general account of the human condition in all its relational complexity.⁷

I have presented this problem of the objectivity of the new thinking as a general problem about how a certain method of philosophical inquiry, one that follows the thinking and experience of the engaged agent and accepts the outcomes of that process, can be both utterly subjective and yet objective. But Rosenzweig, as we shall see, titles this section "Philosophy and Theology" because he sees this problem as specially connected with religious belief, with the experience of God, and with theological reflection. Hence, it is not surprising that Emil Fackenheim, in a subtle examination of this text, focuses on how the problem arises in the encounter between philosophy and religious belief.⁸

Fackenheim recognizes that the problem of objectivity is an old one for religious belief, for the issue always arises how the experience of a single believer has universal validity. That is, philosophy has always

6. The translations in this paragraph are Glatzer's, pp. 208-209.

7. Rosenzweig's problem has many implications. It is, first of all, a problem for his system and for *The Star*; if he cannot solve it, then the results of Parts Two and Three are, at best, his own experience and interpretation; why should others accept it? Furthermore, it is a problem for all situated thinking or existentialist philosophy, as it were, or all hermeneutically sensitive thinking. Finally, as we shall see, Fackenheim takes it to be a classic expression of the conflict between philosophy and religious faith.

8. See Emil L. Fackenheim, "Review of *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* by Nahum Glatzer," *JUDAISM* 2 (1953): 367-72, reprinted in Michael L. Morgan, *The Jewish Thought, of Emil Fackenheim* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), pp. 59-64. See also Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World* (Schocken, 1982), pp. 58-91, especially 72-73.

confronted the particular religious believer with the challenge of objectivity, of showing why the results of a single, individual experience should be compelling and generally accepted. As Fackenheim puts it, philosophy and its objectivity confront the particularity of religious belief with two possibilities. Either objective philosophy seeks to reduce the religious experience and overwhelm it, trying to show that philosophy yields a higher truth or that the religious experience can be explained away by philosophical or social scientific explanations, or, alternatively, philosophy can acknowledge its own limitations, admit the genuineness of the religious experience, and itself make a leap of faith. According to this second option, as Fackenheim says, "objective thought looks at the personal standpoint of faith and decides that it is authentic and true," and this implies that God really speaks, that He can be heard only from the personal standpoint, and that objectivity is less and not more than this relation.⁹

This way of understanding Rosenzweig's problem, moreover, provides Fackenheim with his interpretation of Rosenzweig's solution. According to Rosenzweig,

the theological concept of revelation must provide the bridge from the most subjective to the most objective. Man, as the recipient of revelation, as one who experiences the content of faith, contains both within himself. (*Der Stern*, 117-118; *Hallo*, 106; Glatzer trans., 209)

The philosopher or new thinker who can solve his problem must be a theologian, and "the theologian whom philosophy requires in order to become scientific is a theologian who requires philosophy for the sake of his own honesty." (Ibid.) Confronting the believer, the philosopher admits the authenticity of religious experience, becomes a believer, and thereby instantiates utter subjectivity; the believer, moreover, "requires philosophy" to defend and justify the presuppositions without which the Divine-human relation is impossible and, hence, becomes at the same time objective. The key to Rosenzweig's solution, Fackenheim says, is that the bridge is not the event of revelation itself, but, rather, the concept of revelation (*der Offenbarungsbegriff*), i.e., the philosophical defense of the possibility of revelation against attempts to reduce it to mental projects or something less than a genuine encounter. The experience of the believer, from his or her personal standpoint, the first person point of view, is objectively valid because that same believer has that experience only as a philosopher who has systematically and rationally defended the possibility of revelation. Rosenzweig says that the bridge is the "theological concept of revelation," but the central point, for Fackenheim, is that the defense of this concept is philosophically grounded in "theory, argument, system."

Fackenheim's interpretation may be correct as far as it goes, but

9. Fackenheim, pp. 61-62 (in Morgan).

it surely fails to explain why Rosenzweig believes that philosophy, as the new thinking, *requires* theology, that the new thinker must also be a believer-theologian. Are there not in non-religious, secular experience the resources to overcome the gap? Is this unification of philosophy and religion a necessary step in the redemption and legitimation of philosophy itself? Fackenheim shows that this interrelation is one strategy for redeeming the new thinking as philosophy, but is it the only strategy? Indeed, does Rosenzweig think that it is the only one?

Before we return to Rosenzweig's text and make our own suggestions, we should notice other questions that ought to be answered. First, Rosenzweig makes it clear that what he is after is something that is needed not just for a philosophy that has accepted religious belief, but, indeed, for philosophy that has accepted religious belief but, indeed, for philosophy *per se*. He calls it "a requirement of philosophy which it evidently cannot meet out of its own resources," and "support for its scientific status" (*Der Stern*, 117; Hallo, 105-6). Hence, Fackenheim's interpretation by itself will not do, for it assumes and does not show why the new philosophy *must* turn to religious belief and experience.

Second, if Fackenheim is right, then it seems likely that his model for Rosenzweig's conjunction of "philosophy and theology" is Kierkegaard's conception of faith as an immediacy after reflection.¹⁰ But Rosenzweig's own words suggest that both the objectivity and the subjectivity are somehow united in the very same experience: "Man, as the recipient of revelation, as one who experiences the content of faith, contains both within himself" (*Der Stern*, 118; Hallo; 106; Glatzer trans., 209). This person, because of the features of his experience that is both a religious believing and a philosophical thinking, is the only genuine "scientifically possible" philosopher. In his experience, philosophy and theology are somehow one.

Finally, Rosenzweig prefaces his solution with these words: "Our answer necessarily anticipates and yet stops halfway, with a hint" (*Der Stern*, 117; Hallo, 106). If Fackenheim is right, then what the solution anticipates, when it suggests that the bridge is the "concept of revelation," is a subsequent account of how revelation occurs only after a systematic philosophical defence of the possibility of revelation. But, we must ask, is that what Rosenzweig later provides? Does he show that revelation occurs as an immediate experience prepared by philosophical thought? In the very next section, "Theology and Philosophy," Rosenzweig indicates in a preliminary fashion that just as the new philosophy needs theology, so does the new theology need philosophy.

10. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Doubleday Anchor, 1954), pp. 79, 92; Robert Bretall (ed.), *A Kierkegaard Anthology* (Princeton University Press, 1946), pp. 210-26 (from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*). For discussion of Kierkegaard's conception of faith, see James Collins, "Faith and Reflection in Kierkegaard," in Howard A. Johnson & Niels Thulstrup (eds.), *A Kierkegaard Critique* (Chicago: Gateway, 1962), pp. 141-55.

Ultimately, he says, “the miracle of the personal experience of revelation” will be verified through redemption, i.e., by the relation between revelation and redemption and, hence, by the individual’s response to revelation. But that experience also needs a philosophical ground; Rosenzweig calls this “building a bridge from creation to revelation,” and he glosses this process as “supplying a demonstration of the preconditions on which it rests.” But, and this is the crucial point, Rosenzweig says that the new theology takes its experience to be not content but event, so that its preconditions are not “conceptual elements” but rather “immanent reality” (*Der Stern*, 119-20; Hallo, 107-8). If Fackenheim is correct, then this “immanent reality” and what Rosenzweig calls “the concept of creation” is constituted by a philosophical argument for the possibility of revelation and its presuppositions, e.g., the real separation among God, man, and world.¹¹ But is this what Rosenzweig thinks? Is this what the “created contents” of philosophy amounts to? Indeed, can it be?

What, from Rosenzweig’s point of view, would make the philosopher’s turn to theology necessary? Let me suggest an analogous case. In his longest and most famous essay, *The Apology for Raymond Sebond*, Montaigne employs a battery of skeptical arguments and tropes in order to discredit the reliability of reason and the senses. One interpretation of Montaigne’s conclusions is that he is persuaded by the skeptical outcome, that one should not trust any source of cognitive authority, from reason and the senses to tradition and institutions. Another interpretation, however, shows exactly how the essay is a *defense* of Sebond, whose 15th century rational defense of Christianity Montaigne had translated. On this interpretation, Montaigne, a genuine member of the Counter-Reformation, sought to show the limits of human capabilities and the need for complete and unqualified submission to God and the Church. Only human pride could lead us to reject God and Christian faith, once we were aware of the puny character of our own abilities. On such a view, then, reason and philosophy, among other skills and methods, prove to be limited, and threaten total skepticism; the only way to find certainty is to receive it from another source.

11. In his brilliant discussion of Rosenzweig in *To Mend the World*, Fackenheim, I think, realizes the deficiencies of his earlier account. The new thinking, Rosenzweig says, “narrates how and when the far God becomes near, and the near God far” (*Kleinere Schriften*, p. 384). The outcome is, first, a narration of the world as created, of how “the ‘far’ God forever moving toward ‘nearness’ creates an independent world and affirms it in its otherness. And only in a world thus affirmed can revelation take place.” (*To Mend the World*, p. 75). Here the philosophical preparation for revelation is an understanding of the relation between God and the world as this is portrayed through a narrated experience of the world as created. But, if so, then the philosophy that the new theology needs is not the old philosophy — argument, system, reasoning — but the new philosophy, which, of course, cannot without circularity provide the grounds for its own objectivity. I discuss this important point later.

Could it be that Rosenzweig, in his own way, employs a similar strategy? Could it be that, once philosophy recognizes that it must become perspectival and personal, the only way to avoid subjectivism and more is to accept certainty and objectivity as a gift.¹² It may be true that the new theology also needs philosophy for its own reasons, but the crucial fact is that the new philosopher is threatened with skepticism and more if he does not accept the truth of religious belief, the reality and presence of the Absolute as the ground of nature and history.

How, exactly, would this solution work? Suppose we carry out Rosenzweig's project in the domain of ethics. Traditional moral theory is conducted from a detached point of view; it seeks to understand moral thinking and conduct from an ideal or neutral perspective, and does so by grounding our conceptions of the right and the good in God or in nature or in human rationality. Now suppose that we show how each of these strategies is mistaken or narrow or otherwise misguided, and we recognize that the method for arriving at our understanding of morality has been in error from the start, for what is left out always has something to do with the precise individual, his or her distinctive situation, set of beliefs and attitudes, past, community, and so on. So we begin again, this time following the individual moral agent, tracing her experiences and registering what counts as right and good for her in her situation. But we soon recognize the threat that this method poses. It leaves us with no ground for its results other than the experiences and judgments of the individual whose thinking we are following. We have left behind any appeal to common natural characteristics or to a conception of universal rationality. All has been particularized and historicized. Like Nietzsche and Foucault, we risk the outcome that morality is utterly relative and, fundamentally, a matter of power.

We could accept this. Or, ultimately, we could demand a ground for objectivity and certainty, recognizing that if there is such a ground, it must lie outside of ourselves and our world. But what is left? Only the possibility that the individual agent's experience will point beyond its world and itself and become receptive to such a ground, freely received but graciously given. So this is what we do; we trace the experiencing moral agent as she interprets a world and her action in it in such a way that she becomes receptive to an agency that empowers her judgments and gives them a significance that she takes now to be unconditional. She does not know how that empowerment has come, nor why, but it has, and she accepts it. In so doing, her utterly personal experiences and thinking have yielded objective results.¹³

12. My suggestion, in other words, is that the strategy of Montaigne, like that of Luther, is to recognize human limitation and relocate the foundation of certitude and objectivity in God rather than in man. There is good reason to see this neo-orthodox strategy as appealing to Rosenzweig.

13. In a famous passage from *Ecce Homo*, which both Martin Buber and Fackenheim

Ultimately, Rosenzweig claims, the transition from revelation to redemption will bring confirmation for his system. Others have discussed this feature of his thinking, and we can ignore it here.¹⁴ Our concern is with the way in which theology, in its own way, justifies or legitimizes philosophy.

In addition, of course, philosophy serves the new conception of faith as the personal experience of revelation. In the text which we are discussing, Rosenzweig says that philosophy will serve the new theology, the commitment to the "pure presentness of experience" and the "personal experience of revelation," by exhibiting creation as the precondition of revelation, as the "immanent reality" which makes possible revelation as an actual event (*Der Stern*, 119-20; Hallo, 107-8). What this means is that the thinking experience of the new philosopher must exhibit the world as a created world, as contingent, as grounded in the miraculous and permeable by miracle. Only in such a world is revelation possible. If the experience of the new philosopher showed us that the world is causally closed and necessary, if its results were akin to Spinoza's in the *Ethics*, then the new theologian, committed to personal religious experience as the core of faith, would be unable to affirm, receive, or experience revelation. His way would be blocked, for the precondition, the required state, in which revelation as Divine-human encounter can take place, would not exist for him. However, the new philosopher can exhibit the world as created, and "[T]hereby revelation regains before our amazed eyes the character of authentic miracle — authentic because it becomes wholly and solely the fulfillment of the promise made in creation" (*Der Stern*, 120; Hallo, 108). Moreover, this promise is, in fact, made by a new philosopher who experiences the world as contingent, a post-Humean and post-Kantian new philosopher who appreciates the limits of that with which experience provides us, and the limits beyond which experience cannot go. Although one cannot be absolutely certain about what Rosenzweig here has in mind, he seems to be calling on one of the central findings of "traditional" empiricism and one of its skeptical results, i.e., about our inability to experience causal connections and, hence, natural necessity, in order to ground the new philosopher's experience of the created world.

In both cases, then, when theology grounds the objectivity of the new philosophy and when the new thinking grounds the possibility of the new theology, there is no hint of the old thinking. This is one of

are fond of quoting, Nietzsche says that there are times when one receives and does not ask who gives.

14. See Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, pp. 78-91. See also Reiner Wiehl, "Experience in Rosenzweig's New Thinking," in Paul Mendes-Flohr (ed.), *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig* (University Press of New England, 1988), pp. 42-68; Heinz-Juergen Goertz, "Die Wahrheit der Erfahrung in Franz Rosenzweigs 'Neuem Denken'," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 88 (1981), pp. 389-406.

the problems of Fackenheim's account; where he requires system, reason, and argument, Rosenzweig demands interpreted fact or what he calls "immanent reality." The reason for this shift, moreover, has to do, I think, with an implicit shift in the meaning of "objectivity." According to the old thinking, "objectivity" is associated with certainty, unconditionality, universality, and necessity. It is the proper correlate of an impersonal, detached, disengaged, and transcendent perspective. Hence, it would be odd, in a sense, to demand this kind of objectivity for the new thinking, and I do not believe that Rosenzweig made this mistake. For the new thinking, on the other hand, "objectivity" can mean only agreement, acceptance, commitment, and such notions. To ask "can the new thinking be scientific?" is to ask how it can yield such agreement and commitment. And here everything depends on *whose* agreement. If one is persuaded by Rosenzweig's refutation of the old thinking and by the need to avoid relativism and subjectivism, then the personal experience of revelation will persuade you, too, like the believer, to accept the impact of the Other, and your agreement will constitute what objectivity there is for such claims as the new thinking makes. Thereby, what the new thinking (and, for some, recent scientific evidence as well) yields about the world as a created, miracle-permeated venue, will be accepted as objective, and, hence, as the genuine establishment of the precondition necessary for the possibility of revelation. In this sense, philosophy, as Rosenzweig puts it, is the "authentic *authoritas* suited to [the] new form" of religious faith (*Der Stern*, 120; Hallo, 108). There is a circle here, but it is not vicious.

The problem of objectivity, that Rosenzweig acknowledged and attempted to solve in his own context and for his own purposes, is a problem of tremendous importance in contemporary thinking.¹⁵ Various recent developments in philosophy, literary criticism, history of science, historiography, anthropology, and art have led to a widespread conviction that our conceptual schemes or *Weltanschauungen* are interpretations through and through, that there is nothing that is secure and certain, and that all of our theories or points of view are grounded only in utility, acceptance, or power. In such an environment, there is a great need to find some principles or values that are secure and fixed.¹⁶ Some deny the entire account as relativist and dangerous;¹⁷

15. Among philosophers, see, for example, Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1987); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Harvard, 1988); Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," reprinted in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 183-98; Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge, 1981); Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge, 1986).

16. In Rorty's terms, an ironist must still seek principles of solidarity; in a world in which everything is interpretation through and through, there are still practices, like torture, that are unconditionally wrong.

17. This is the position of Leo Strauss, among others. For a recent version of the Strauss-

others admit that we are irreducibly hermeneutical in our understanding but that we nonetheless value certain things unconditionally.¹⁸ Others succumb to the relativism and historicism of the age. This is not the time to discuss these matters. It is sufficient to appreciate that these problems were, in a sense, already present to Rosenzweig and his colleagues. Like us, they recognized the deficiencies of old modes of thinking and were aware of the dangers of the new. I have tried to show how, in one case, this was so.

ian attack, see Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (Simon and Schuster, 1987).

18. Something like this is the view of Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self* and elsewhere.

Germans and Jews — The Symbiosis That Failed

W. GUNTHER PLAUT

I WAS BORN IN MÜNSTER, WESTPHALIA, A pleasant university town where my mother had also been born. When I was very young, our family moved to Berlin, and I remained there until my emigration to the United States in 1935.

Strange to contemplate: the first memory of my life that has stayed with me is the waving of flags and popular jubilation. It was, my parents told me later, the celebration of Germany's victory at Tannenberg over the Russians during the First World War. But other childhood memories are more somber. My father was in uniform, two of my mother's brothers died as officers in the German army, the country suffered from a blockade which restricted our diet severely, and my selective memory of childhood recalls also that during the summers I did not wear shoes, leather being in short supply.

When the war ended, and Germany had been defeated and the Kaiser had fled to Holland, there was fighting in the streets of Berlin. For a young boy, those were exciting times, but, of course, the deeper implications of the events then unfurling were unknown to me. I did not know about the Hitler *putsch* in Munich, but what I do remember is the shock and agony created in our household by the murder of Walter Rathenau, Germany's foreign minister and the first Jew to be elevated to such high position. My father was more deeply upset than I had ever seen him before. It was the summer of 1922.

Much later did I comprehend what went through his mind: A descendant of an old Hessian-Jewish family, that had come to Germany probably before 1500, Father considered the country his natural habitat, as it had been for his forebears. In the murder of Rathenau — a Jew more in name than in substance — he felt that a direct blow had been struck at German Jewry, and thus at himself, by people who wanted to warn all Jews that their place in the country could never be secure. He knew that Rathenau was killed not so much because of any policies that he had instituted, but because he was a born Jew, and, therefore, fundamentally unacceptable. To be sure, the murderers were apprehended and convicted, and one of them later even wrote a book asking for forgiveness, yet the wound left a scar on the soul of German Jewry,

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and my father never forgot it. Neither did I, and, as I grew up, I began to understand what it really betokened.

While my grandparents on both sides were Orthodox, our small nuclear family lived a Liberal Jewish life, which in American terms may best be described as Conservative: *kashrut* flavoured with ritual permissiveness and a theology which was Reform in all its aspects. We always went to services for *Kabbalat Shabbat*, while on *Shabbat* mornings I, like all young people in Germany, attended public school. That was one of the things we took for granted, for school lasted for six days. While we had one student in class who did not write on *Shabbat*, and was given permission to take his exams on some other day, my parents allowed me to write and also to ride to school. We were moderate Liberals, with the emphasis on Liberals.

In high school I knew that we five Jewish students were somehow set apart, and we took that, too, for granted. We took it for granted that we were different. We were living in Germany and were German citizens, but it was clear that we were not like "them." Political and cultural anti-Semitism was an accepted backdrop to our lives, and with the rise of the Nazis it invaded our classroom. Still, it was the shock of my young life when I found that the boy who had sat next to me for the last six years one day sported a swastika in his lapel. I never spoke to him again.

I entered law school in 1930, and refused to join either of the two Jewish fraternities. For that matter, I joined no other group at first. I suppose I was an unpolitical person and my interests lay more in sports and chess. In time, though, I was attracted to the Social Democrats, and participated in some of their street battles with the Nazi student federation. Somehow, even this left no permanent impression on me. Perhaps the main reason was that I was simply too immature to take a wider view.

But, certainly, I never possessed any German national sentiments. Those were clearly reserved for non-Jews. To be sure, there was a small segment of the Jewish population that was super-nationalistic, but they were laughed at by the people I knew and not taken seriously, and their numbers remained insignificant. In our home, all forms of nationalism — which at that time included Zionism as well — were looked at with a good deal of suspicion, for in Germany, nationalism was then, and had always been, the property of those who considered the nation their exclusive possession, something that by definition excluded all foreign elements, and especially Jews. When I grew up, the Republic's flag, black, red and gold, was never accepted by the right-wing element. For them, the true German colours were black, white and red.

As I look back, the symbolism of the flag revealed a good deal about the state of the country: it had no perception of itself and it was divided in its very heart. And we, as Jews, though we fervently

supported the fragile democracy which was then ours, had no real share in the country's decision. It was "they" who would have to chart the direction of the land. We, as Jews, seemed to stand aside. We were *in* Germany, and had been there for a long time. We were citizens. But we were not like "them" — we were not *of* Germany in the full sense.

Much later I read the discussion then going on in the intellectual Jewish and Gentile circles. German writers, from Fichte on, had spoken with increasing enthusiasm and conviction of *Deutschtum*, which may best be rendered as "the essence of being German."

Just what this betokened was hard to describe. Certainly, it has a *völkisch* element to it, a belief that there was something inherent in the German people that was good and noble. The intellectuals of the pre-Nazi era would describe it as a combination of pride in reliability and industriousness, the freedom to think, to have a world vision; it meant esthetics, both cultural and social, a progressive social policy, a sense of order, correctness, and obligation. In our day, it is hard to think that these values were once ascribed to Germany by its best citizens, including the Jews.

It is not my task to describe why and how the German nation came to identify itself in this fashion, or how the French did it in theirs, or, for that matter, how Americans came to consider themselves as bearers of a manifest destiny. Let it be said merely that, in fact, there were markers by which Jews could measure themselves in Germany, and it is important to remember that the Jews of eastern Europe looked at their western neighbour with admiration and at its universities with the greatest respect. Germany was the intellectual mecca of the world. It had a musical tradition second to none, and a scientific establishment that was clearly the world's leader. It was here that the major Jewish movements we know today had their origin. Not only Reform was born there, but so were Conservatism and Orthodoxy as well as Agudat Yisrael, and so, in large measure, was political Zionism. It was in Germany that the Jewish National Fund was organized. It was a Jew of the German cultural realm, Theodor Herzl, who was the father of the State of Israel, and when I once asked Nahum Goldmann, the principal spirit of recent Diaspora Jewish leadership, what he, a child of the East and a world citizen, considered himself to be *culturally*, he unhesitatingly said, as late as 1970, "A German, of course."

Leading Jewish intellectuals held that there was an inner link between being Jewish and the essence of German culture, between *Judentum* and *Deutschtum*. This relationship was often debated and discussed, both by anti-Semites and by Jews. In order fully to comprehend the depth of this sentiment, it is instructive to listen to Hermann Cohen, who, in the early stages of the First World War, when the United States had not as yet joined the conflict, appealed to American Jews not to

believe the stories then circulating about German atrocities in Belgium but, rather, to look at the German record, at the real nature of that land, its ideals and accomplishments, and, above all, to understand the close link between *Deutschtum* and *Judentum* — between the essence of being a German and of being a Jew.

Cohen's letter projects for us, through the mind and pen of a man who was one of the keenest thinkers of his time, the depth of the belief in the reality of the German-Jewish symbiosis. He wrote:

Moses Mendelssohn was a German, a German thinker, a German writer, the genuine equal friend of the great Lessing. Like Luther, Mendelssohn translated our Pentateuch out of his German soul, and made it possible for us to enter the world of German culture through the German language. The entire rejuvenation of our worship occurred first in Germany and through the German spirit. It is the work of German culture and German religiosity to which our own sentiment felt itself drawn at once, because the historical spirit of Protestantism has also been the vital nerve of our own medieval religious philosophy since Saadya Gaon. The reform of Judaism became a German reform, and, from Germany and through Germans, it migrated to you [in America].

Dear brethren in America! You will understand me now if I say to you: Every Jew of the Occident must, in addition to his political fatherland, recognize also the motherland of his religiosity as the basic esthetic force and centre of his cultural sentiments — and that is Germany which he must honour and love. I have the conviction that even in every educated Russian Jew there lives this admiration for German education; therefore, I also have the confidence that the Russian Jew follows our armed struggle with Russia with special hopes in his Jewish heart ...

It is difficult to resist the temptation of being a prophet. If often we despaired of Russia's future, still today, because of its machinations, a great hope has risen. Germany, the homeland of humanitarianism, of the freedom of conscience and of social welfare policies, has been called to battle by its enemies all around, who, though they are civilized nations, have made a compact with Russia. I have the feeling that some day a divine judgment will come on Russia, not in the least because of its undisguised measures for the extermination of the Jewish people. Every Jew who is convinced of the cultural power of his religion and, therefore, of its right to life, must deem himself happy if his patriotism accords to him at least neutrality in this war, but he must envy us German Jews who can battle for our Fatherland, borne at the same time by the pious conviction that we will obtain human rights for the greater part of our co-religionists. Germany, the motherland of Occidental Jewry, the land of intellectual freedom and ethics, Germany will, by its victory, found justice and peace amongst the peoples of the world. We trust in the logic of our fate and of our history.¹

1. *Jüdische Schriften*, ed. Bruno Strauss (Berlin, 1924), II, p. 229 ff.; see also pp. 237 ff., 319-340. Cohen frequently expressed this belief. "We love our German identity not only because we love our homeland as a bird loves its nest, and also not only because we received our spiritual upbringing from the treasures of the German spirit as much as from the Bible and Talmud, ... but rather because the way of the German spirit is completely and profoundly in harmony with our messianic religion ... The German

The liberals, many of whom clustered around the *Centralverein* (C.V.), firmly believed that Cohen's philosophy provided the best basis for the fight against the persistent outcroppings of anti-Semitism. In 1914, shortly after the outbreak of the war, Ludwig Holländer wrote:

Just as those on the battlefield who belong to the Jewish faith strike a blow for the honour of Jewry as they struggle for the honour of Germany, so, too, those Jews who remain behind on the home front can be certain that everyone who lives and works quietly and modestly for the wellbeing of the German fatherland and its inhabitants also contributes today to the honour of the Jewish name. Such Jews will cause many of the aspersions of the past to be cast aside, and the German way of life will permit the rays from the bright light of its justice to shine ever more strongly upon Germany's Jewish children.²

Three years later, in 1917, Rabbi Felix Goldmann of Oppeln, addressing the general assembly of the *Centralverein*, declared that the organization's primary mission was the education of the German public concerning German-Jewry's "membership im *Deutschtum*."³ Hugo Sonnenfeld voiced a similar opinion:

The Jew has been rooted in Germany since long ago. Jews already lived along the Rhine during the time of the Roman Empire; no one has the right to declare them foreigners upon German soil. Yet, we have been treated as such; our children have had their rights curtailed, and discrimination and evil against us have been tolerated. It is precisely because of this, however — precisely because prejudice, deprivation and humiliation have not been able to impair it — that our love for our German fatherland distinguishes itself . . . Yet, precisely at this time of danger and suffering for our fatherland do we feel above all how precious our German fatherland is to us . . . We swear before everyone that at this time the Jews will forget all that has been done to them; they will show the fatherland that for them, no sacrifice is too great.⁴

Cohen himself believed anti-Semitism to be a non-malignant, transient phenomenon, and suggested that the idea that Jews were equal citizens had taken deeper root in Germany than anywhere else.⁵

Cohen's statements on the nexus between *Deutschtum* and *Judentum* exerted a deep and lasting influence upon the Jewish defence leadership, which employed them consistently during the final years of the war in support of the strategy of non-confrontation. But not everyone shared his view. Thus, the Zionists would agree only that Russia was *the* enemy. Heinrich Loewe wrote in early August, 1914, even before war had broken out:

spirit is the spirit of classical humanity and true cosmopolitanism" (*KC-Blätter*, May-June and July-August, 1916).

2. *Im deutschen Reich*, October-December 1914: 371-373. Quoted by Jürgen Matthäus in "Deutschtum and Judentum under Fire," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook XXXIII* (1988), pp. 129-147, to whom I am indebted for this and other quotations.

3. *Stenographischer Bericht*, 1917, pp. 38-39.

4. *Im deutschen Reich*, November 1918: 433-434.

5. *Jüdische Schriften*, pp.279-280.

We are confronted by the harshest tyranny, by the bloodiest cruelty and darkest reaction . . . Our armor will secure not only the security of our women and children against the enemies of the country; we protect not only home and hearth of our own families; they are at the same time the only hope of millions and millions of the oppressed in the Russian empire . . . As Jews, we have still another reckoning with the barbarians of the east.⁶

But, otherwise, the German Zionist movement rejected the notion that a shallow patriotism would be a means of integrating *Judentum* and *Deutschtum*. Kurt Blumenfeld, mentor of the movement, put it strongly:

Jewish circles who are primarily concerned with the battle against anti-Semitism have never made a serious attempt to understand the inner reasons for anti-Semitism. The courage to understand that anti-Semitism is not only a misunderstanding, not only a haphazard, temporary attitude, can never be understood by people who do not have the courage truly to be Jewish . . . Never has a battle been fought with poorer means than the so-called battle against anti-Semitism. In truth, it is nothing but a battle against Semitism, against the Jewish particularity itself . . . By capitulating continually before anti-Semitism, one pretends to defeat it. Cowardly mimicry is the standard weapon in this struggle.⁷

A classic debate between Martin Buber and Cohen exposed the opposing views in their full intellectual dimension. While Buber, an East European Jew by birth and tradition, had also come to believe that "the German spirit" had a particular attraction, his Zionist conviction pointed him in a different direction. He criticized Cohen's insistence that Jews were "German citizens of the Jewish faith," and that such a definition would be a proper base for the fight against anti-Semitism. He argued that it was the primary task of the Jew to find himself and his roots, and not to seek integration with another culture, however prized it might be. It was Cohen's thesis, put forward in his rejoinder to Buber, that *Deutschtum* embodied supreme Jewish religious values, and that Jewish amalgamation into German society was a necessary condition for the realization of the Jewish Messianic ideal.⁸

Franz Rosenzweig, then still a soldier, also disapproved of Cohen's identification of *Deutschtum* and *Judentum*, and wrote:

To be a German means to be *fully* responsible for one's nation, to harmonize not only with Goethe, Schiller and Kant, but also with the others, and especially the trashy and mediocre ones, the assessor, the fraternity student, the petty clerk, the pig-headed peasant, the stiff schoolteacher; the true German must either take all these to his heart or else suffer from them . . . Cohen, however, has only Europeanism; there is no genuine Germanism for it to combine with, and Judaism, of which he has

6. *Jüdische Rundschau*, XIX, August 7, 1914: 343. See Rivka Horwitz, "Voices of Opposition . . .," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, XXXIII (1988), pp. 233-259; also David Engel, "Patriotism as a Shield," *Ibid.*, XXXI (1986), pp. 147-172.

7. *Jüdische Rundschau*, XX, July 23, 1915: 239-240.

8. Buber's article appeared in *Der Jude*, July, 1916: 281-289, and Cohen responded in the *KC-Blätter*, quoted above. Buber replied in *Der Jude*, September, 1916: 425 to 433.

plenty, is notoriously incapable of cross-breeding. So, in the man everything remains merely juxtaposed, while in his writing we find the mad acrobatics of *Deutschtum* and *Judentum* in which Cohen, after speculating upon the Christian element in the German, proceeds to pronounce this element Jewish.⁹

After the notorious wartime census of the Jews he wrote:

We are Germans; this you can safely say about our political affiliation, as long as this state which "counts" so wonderfully still recognizes us 'amongst its citizens . . . The people, however, in contrast to the state, do not count us among themselves.¹⁰

George Mosse avers that, while most German Jews succumbed to the almost irresistible temptation to share to the full the German war experience,

after the war, many had a rude awakening and recaptured the liberal and Enlightenment tradition. At that time, establishment figures like [Leo] Baeck had more in common with the left wing Jewish intellectuals than they might have cared to admit. Both believed that man must be the end and never the means, and that war perverted the inherent virtues of man.¹¹

As soon as the conflict was over, and the dogs of war had been reined in, anti-Semitism, which during the conflict had been confined to right-wing writings, now became vicious and violent. The frustration of the German people over Versailles, and the destruction of the middle class in the wake of unchecked inflation, prepared a fertile ground for Hitler's propaganda. And, while the earlier Cohen had talked of the German-Jewish symbiosis as a reality, the popular German novelist Jakob Wassermann saw a new reality and took a directly opposite view.

9. *Briefe und Tagebücher* (Den Haag, 1979), p. 424.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 349.

11. *The Jews and the German War Experience 1914-1918*, Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture XXI (New York 1977), p. 14. Mosse goes on to say: "To be sure, all Jewish papers exhorted young Jews to do their best, and called upon them to volunteer for the colors. Yet, there is enough meaningful difference that we can talk, if not consistently, about an ethical imperative which remained intact. If Jews were prone to accept Christian metaphors because ideas and rituals taken from the non-Jewish environment had penetrated to the heart of Judaism during the process of assimilation, so the ideals of the Enlightenment lasted longest among the Jews. The *Israelitische Wochenblatt*, as early as September, 1914, warned against 'unhealthy chauvinism' and appealed to reason instead. (Quoted in *Jüdische Rundschau*, September 14, 1914, p. 361) . . . The veterans' organization, *Der Stahlhelm*, for example, opposed the Republic in order to transmit 'the spirit of the front-line soldier' to future generations. According to *Der Stahlhelm*, the new nation was to be built upon the 'camaraderie of the trenches,' yet the Jewish soldier was not excluded from such comradeship. As Jews formed their own veterans' organization, the cooperation between all faiths which had taken place on the front collapsed — Christianity had become too Germanized, an integral part of the *Volksgemeinschaft* embattled against the enemy" (Mosse, p. 18). See also Benjamin Segal, *Der Weltkrieg und das Schicksal der Juden*, (Berlin, 1915), and Ismar Schorsch, *On the History of the Political Judgment of the Jew*, Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture XX, New York, 1976.

It reflected a view which abandoned the euphoric hopes that the common war experience had engendered. Written in 1921, a mere six years later than Cohen's appeal, Wassermann's disappointment with Germany was as profound as it was memorable to young people like me.

It is in vain to adjure the nation of poets and thinkers in the name of its poets and its thinkers. Every prejudice that one believed overcome brings forth a thousand new maggots like a carcass.

It is in vain to present the right cheek after the left one has been struck. It does not make them hesitant in the least, it does not touch them, it does not disarm them: they will strike the right cheek also.

It is in vain to cast words of reason into the raving tumult of words. They say: "What, he dares to make sound? Shut up his face!"

It is in vain to be an example. They say: "We know nothing, we have seen nothing, we have heard nothing."

It is in vain to seek obscurity. They say: "The coward! His bad conscience forces him to hide away."

It is in vain to go amongst them and offer them one's hand. They say: "How dare he with his Jewish impudence!"

It is in vain to be loyal to them, either as a fellow-fighter, or as a fellow-citizen. They say: "He is like Proteus, he can be anything."

It is in vain to help them break the chains of slavery from their arms. They say: "He has probably made his profit doing so."

It is in vain to neutralize the poison. They brew it afresh.

It is in vain to live for them or to die for them. They say: "He is a Jew."¹²

Without knowing it, or understanding its deeper implications, I became aware that the German-Jewish symbiosis had failed. I should add quickly that this did not mean that therefore I would contemplate emigration. Not at all. Living as a Jew with, and amongst Germans was a condition of life that had been with my family and the rest of German Jewry for many centuries. It was an accepted fact, and one became accustomed to it as a natural aspect of daily life. In pre-Nazi days, during the Republic, all positions were theoretically open to us, and I firmly contemplated becoming either a career diplomat or a judge.

As for being Jewish, this, too, was a natural part of my life. It meant that I had a certain ethical and religious tradition which was different from "theirs" — one that in my every-day existence was, in those days, secured by law. I don't ever remember saying or thinking that I was "a German" — I was simply a German Jew. Being a Jew

12. *Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude* (Berlin 1921), p. 122f.

was the noun and carried the weight of my self-definition. "German" was merely the adjective that described the special aspect of my Jewishness. I was first and foremost a Jew.

Then came the ascent of Hitler to the chancellorship, and the torch parade of the stormtroopers through the streets of Berlin. Even then we believed that, in the course of time, there would be once again a change of government, and extreme German nationalism would give way to that steady, though, at times, unpleasant relationship between Germans and Jews.

All this was, for me at least, shattered on April 1, 1933. That date was my mother's birthday and had always been celebrated with great aplomb, but in 1933 it became the day also of the Nazi boycott of all Jewish establishments, the day of the official degradation of the German Jew, and his official separation from the German people. The symbiosis which had never fully succeeded was now being publicly dissolved and declared not only to be a failure, but an existential impossibility. Four days later, the Zionist weekly, *Die Jüdische Rundschau*, carried an editorial by Robert Weltsch. It was entitled "*Tragt ihn mit Stolz, den gelben Fleck*" (Wear the Yellow Badge with Pride).

The badge of which Weltsch spoke was not as yet affixed to our clothing. That came later. It was, however, from now on the ineluctable mark of distinction affixed to the soul of every Jew simply because of his Jewishness.

On that day, Robert Weltsch became our prophet, speaking with a voice as incisive as one for whom the title *navi* is usually reserved. The last paragraph of his editorial read:

The mark of the Jew was pressed upon all Jews of Germany on the first of April. Everyone knows who is a Jew. Evasion or hiding are no longer possible. The Jewish answer is clear — it is the short sentence which the prophet Jonah spoke: *Ivri anokhi*. Yes, a Jew. To say "yes," to be Jewish, that is the moral sense of the present events. The times are too agitated to allow for argumentation. Let us hope that quieter times will come. We Jews, we can defend our honour. We think of all those who for 5,000 years were called Jews and were stigmatized as such. We are reminded that we are Jews. We say "yes" and wear the yellow badge with pride.¹³

But there were still the voices amongst us for whom the breach between Jewishness and Germanness was only temporary. For them, the essentials of being a Jew were paralleled by the best that was inherent in true German culture. They felt that the symbiosis had suffered a temporary but not a permanent setback. Amongst these was none other than Martin Buber, who wrote during those days:

With all the national relationships into which the Jewish people has entered, with all the problems implied thereby, none has been as fruitful as the German-Jewish tie. The living together of *Deutschtum* and *Judentum*

13. *Jüdische Rundschau*, April 4, 1933: 1.

has in our day reached its crisis. Out of this we must grasp the present task of Jewish popular education in Germany. Today we need not disassociate from *Deutschtum*, with which we have had an inner relationship which nothing that Germans do can change . . . To say this has nothing to do with those empty declarations of love and loyalty which we in our days hear occasionally amongst German Jewry. It means, rather, a concentration on Judaism, a new binding of the first bondedness in the hope of a covenant. We must make necessity the father of a *great* virtue.¹⁴

In this respect Buber was much like Weltsch. Both wanted to use the crisis as an opportunity for deepening Jewish knowledge, Jewish pride and Jewish identity.

In many ways, Buber represents the paradigm of the symbiosis that failed, but which until the last moment remained an ideal for him. He, a lifelong Zionist, who had already participated in a Zionist Congress in 1899, and was a child of Eastern Europe, had nevertheless come to identify himself with *Deutschtum* — without thereby losing anything of his Jewishness. On the contrary, he always considered one to reinforce the other.

Today, with the shadow of the Nazi experience hovering over our perception of what Germany was like, such an identification seems almost incomprehensible — yet it was there. There were many Jews like Buber and Cohen who believed that there was something in the German soul that spoke to the highest ideals of humanity, intellectually as well as morally. And it was with that aspect that Jews would — and could, feel an affinity. Therefore, one should not be surprised that it was not until 1938, literally the last moment, that Buber the Zionist took up the opportunity to make *aliyah*.

In retrospect, one should not blame German Jews for being short-sighted or unduly nationalistic. The symbiosis which they felt was a reality did not have any “rah-rah” quality to it. There was much less identification of Jews with Germany than there has been of American Jews with the United States. In America, the Jews saw the opportunity for living freely and untrammelled, without the strictures of the old world, and so they made America their own, with an enthusiasm and abandon quite unknown anywhere in Europe.

In Germany, in pre-Hitler days, the identification was of a different nature. It had to do less with liberty and free access to any opportunities than with intellectual aspiration, with a way of treating life in an orderly and thoughtful fashion, of valuing education and of making *Bildung* the foundation of one's worth. The symbiosis of which German Jews dreamt was not of the material kind and it was not political. It had to do with intellectual affinity and with an outlook on life which had an identifiably worthwhile character. That the symbiosis failed is not

14. From an address delivered November 19, 1933; quoted in W. G. Plaut, *The Growth of Reform Judaism* (New York, 1965), p. 133.

a blot on Jewish memory. German Jews were not any less farsighted than American Jews — and it is well to remember that there are many, especially Israelis, who continue to preach the concept of *shelilat hagolah* (the worthlessness of Diaspora) and include in this dire warning American Jews as well. They, too, say: “Get out before it is too late.”

I cannot here discuss the oft-studied and debated subject of the reasons why the German-Jewish symbiosis never had a chance. For this, I refer the reader to the works of Peter Gay and George L. Mosse.¹⁵ The latter, especially, described the nature of the *völkisch* current in German self-perception, which excluded the Jew, which exclusion found its virulent expression in the anti-Semitism of the late nineteenth century and forward. In Fritz K. Ringer’s words, “Mosse describes the anti-Semites’ hero as ‘the settled farmer, the traditional burger, the provincial — the philistine’. National Socialism, says Mosse, was the ultimate victory of the ‘philistine with a soul.’”¹⁶

Peter Gay therefore disputes the oft-heard idea that the advent of Hitler was an historical accident.

Hitler was neither an unwelcome invader nor an uncaused accident. Much in the German situation of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries pointed to him, or to someone like him . . . There is no need to exchange the tendentious condemnation of the whole German past for an equally tendentious denial of all antecedents, in that past, for the Nazi trauma. There was significant continuity between the Germany of the nineteenth and that of the twentieth centuries, but there was equally significant discontinuity.¹⁷

Because there was both continuity and discontinuity, says Gay, one cannot speak of Nazism as a predictable event that grew out of its antecedents. Rather, it was both unique and, at the same time, founded solidly in German history.

We who grew up in Germany did not know of this scenario. I had no idea that “they” considered me the antithesis to rootedness, that I was the representative of an intolerable modernism which the German *Spiessbürger* — the quintessential philistine — was unable to comprehend, much less to conquer. It was Nazism that helped him do just that, but what Jew was there who lived his life in Germany with the comprehension of today’s analysts?

Seen from the latter-day perspective of history, there were, indeed, landmarks which signified danger and discontinuity.

For one, Germans were part of an essentially homogeneous nation, in language and culture. To be sure, they had regional differences.

15. See, especially, Peter Gay, *Freud, Jews and Other Germans*, (New York 1978); George L. Mosse, *Germans and Jews: The Right, The Left and the Search for a “Third Force” in Pre-Nazi Germany* (New York, 1970).

16. See Ringer’s thoughtful critique of Mosse’s above-cited work in *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 44, no. 3 (September 1972): 392ff.

17. Gay, *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

Bavarians were not Prussians; still, their German bondedness was clear and historically unmistakable, despite the multiple divisions which had marked the country during the previous century. It was this basic homogeneity that made it difficult for Jews to be accepted. Cultural pluralism was, in Germany, a non-starter.

But, in addition, Germans were more than a nation, they were a people, a *Volk*. And Jews, too, were a *Volk*, and, therefore, *other* by definition. They, too, insisted on being who they were, and the misconceptions about German Jewry as being highly assimilationist are a gross misreading of their true history.¹⁸ Of course, there was assimilation, especially in the large cities, as it existed and exists everywhere in the Diaspora. But, as a whole, German Jewry was also the fertile soil from which the great Jewish spiritual and political movements of these last hundred and fifty years sprang. Jews never abandoned the notion of Jewish peoplehood, and most were aware on some level that a fundamental tension existed between being Jewish in Germany and being part of the nation.

A further consideration relates to the intellectual heritage of Germany. Its leadership considered itself to be the bearer of a world mission which was salvational in nature. They thought and taught that Germany was unique, which was, in its way, a competitive claim with the Jewish insistence on specialness.

Therefore, taken all in all, the symbiosis was doomed, although no one could have predicted the excesses of anti-Semitism which wrote such a terrible conclusion to the failure.

Franz Rosenzweig had his own way of describing this riddle-laden relationship. When he was asked whether it should be “Germans *and* Jews” or “Germans *or* Jews,” his answer was that, in the final analysis, this would have to be left to God. Perhaps, he ventured, sometimes it was one, and another time, it was the other. The symbiosis will both succeed and fail, and Jews will be at times part of their environment and then experience a fracture.

The German-Jewish relationship was a troubled and, in its heyday, a glorious one as well. The fact that it dissolved in a river of blood and misery was not, and could not have been, foreseen, and the basic problem which it betokened attends us and any Diaspora community as well. The question of German Jewry was solved by history. What it might be for us, is something that we need to contemplate in our day.

18. Why and how this misconception arose and was fostered as a “fact of history” is a subject that exceeds the limits of this article.

The Education of an American Orthodox Rabbi: Mayer Joshua Rosenberg Comes to Holyoke, Massachusetts

IRA ROBINSON

ALL STUDENTS OF NORTH AMERICAN Judaism have remarked that the role of the rabbi in America underwent a significant transformation from the traditions of the European rabbinate.¹ It is likewise generally accepted that the brunt of this adjustment was borne by immigrant Orthodox rabbis. However, until recently, the lives of these Yiddish-speaking, Eastern European Orthodox rabbis, either singly or collectively, has been but little studied, and the process of acclimatization of these rabbis to the realities of North American Jewish life has been less than thoroughly examined.²

In this article, I hope to shed light on this critical process of acclimatization, through the study of a series of letters, written in the years 1920-1923, between two immigrant Orthodox rabbis in North America — father and son. The father, Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg (1859-1935) had been living in Montreal, Canada since 1919, having had a long, previous rabbinical career in various cities in Poland as well as in Toronto, to which he had emigrated in 1913.³ His son, Mayer Joshua Rosenberg

1. The best historical statement on the history of the American rabbinate is *The American Rabbinate: A Centennial View*, contained in the November, 1983 issue of *American Jewish Archives*.

2. The most comprehensive examination of the American Orthodox rabbinate is by Jeffrey Gurock, "Resisters and Accommodators: Varieties of Orthodox Rabbis in America, 1886-1983," *American Jewish Archives* 35 (1983): 100-187. Cf. the Study of Rabbi Eliezer Silver by Aaraon Rothkopf-Rakefet, *The Silver Era in American Orthodoxy* (Jerusalem and New York, 1981).

3. Yudel Rosenberg's rabbinical career in Poland is notable for his extensive publication of Hasidic and kabbalistic works, some of which were presented to the public as editions of centuries-old manuscripts. On this aspect of his career, see Ira Robinson, "Literary Forgery and Hasidic Judaism: The Case of Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg," *JUDAISM*, vol. 40, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 61-78. When Rosenberg crossed the Atlantic, he continued publishing extensively, and was involved as well in Jewish communal disputes. For aspects of his North American career, see Ira Robinson, "A Letter From the Sabbath Queen: Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg Addresses Montreal Jewry," in Ira Robinson, Pierre Anctil and Mervin Butovsky, eds., *An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish Culture in Montreal* (Montreal, 1990). I am presently writing a full-scale biography of Rosenberg, to be entitled *A Kabbalist in Montreal*. See, also, with some caution, the memoir by Yudel Rosenberg's daughter, Leah Rosenberg, *The Errand Runner: Reflections of a Rabbi's Daughter* (Toronto, 1981).

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(1885-1940), who had but recently emigrated from Poland, was commencing his first rabbinic position in Holyoke, Massachusetts. The circumstances of Mayer Joshua's emigration, as we will see, made him very much in need of the sort of fatherly advice that he would receive in these letters.⁴

The reason for this is that Mayer Joshua became a rabbi entirely by accident. He had received a good rabbinic education in Poland, as well as at the Yeshiva of Volozhin.⁵ However, a marriage with the daughter of a wealthy Warsaw merchant made it unnecessary for him to employ his knowledge for material gain. He was able to live the privileged life of a gentleman scholar, supported by his father-in-law. He dabbled in Hebrew poetry, which, presumably because of his position, he published under a pseudonym, and also participated in the politics of the religious Zionist organization, Mizrahi, in Poland.⁶

Even the crisis of World War I did not make a tremendous difference in his privileged lifestyle; his family survived the war with its wealth basically intact. Because of this wealth, Mayer Joshua was able to fulfill his ambition to emigrate to Palestine in 1920 on a "capitalist" immigration certificate.⁷ Prior to actually emigrating to Palestine, however, Mayer Joshua decided to pay a visit to this father in Canada.

On the way to Canada, he converted his funds from Polish zlotys to German marks, on the very eve of the hyperinflation which would soon render the German mark practically worthless. Thus, he embarked from Europe a well-to-do man and arrived in Canada practically a pauper.⁸

Without the requisite funds, Mayer Joshua Rosenberg was unable to continue his journey to Palestine, and was forced to seek a livelihood in North America. Through an advertisement placed in the Yiddish press,⁹ he was able to obtain a position as rabbi of the Orthodox community in Holyoke, Massachusetts, and entered his duties there in the autumn of 1920, educated theoretically for the rabbinate but woefully deficient in the practical aspects of being a rabbi in the North American context. In a series of letters, preserved by Mayer Joshua's descendants, the Ben-Meir family of Jerusalem,¹⁰ Yudel Rosenberg took in hand his son's practical education for the communal rabbinate in America.

4. The two sources available for a biography of Mayer Joshua Rosenberg are the introduction to the third edition of his rabbinical work, *Kur ha-Mivhan* (Jerusalem, 1978), edited by Rabbi Yisrael Shlomo Ben-Meir, and a family history entitled "Memorandum," in Yiddish, found in the Yudel Rosenberg file, Jewish Canadiana Collection, Jewish Public Library, Montreal, Canada.

5. *Kur ha-Mivhan*, introduction.

6. "Memorandum," p. 1.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

8. *Ibid.* Cf. L. Rosenberg, *Errand Runner*, pp. 68-69.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

10. The originals of the letters are in the possession of Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Meir of Jerusalem. I am grateful to him and to my colleague, Dr. Simcha Fishbane, who was instrumental in obtaining photocopies of these letters for me.

What follows is a translation of excerpts from the letters, all of which are from Yudel Rosenberg to his son; unfortunately, the letters from Mayer Joshua to his father have not been preserved. The translation will attempt to be faithful both to the letter and the spirit of the elegant and ornate rabbinic Hebrew in which the letters were written, while in general skipping the detailed and complex halakhic argumentation contained in them. What will remain are the issues confronting an Orthodox rabbi in that era: synagogue politics, divorce, conversion, *kashrut*, rabbinical organization and, above all, "America."

Deletions are marked with a diæresis [. . .] Material contained within square brackets [] are additions to the text made by the translator in order to facilitate comprehension.

The Letters

Fifth Day of [*parshat*] *va-Yeze*, [5]681 [November 18, 1920]

To his honor, my dear and beloved son the distinguished rabbi M[ayer] J[oshua] R[osen]b[erg], rabbi of the city of Holyoke, Massachusetts:

. . . I inform you that I am sending to you in this [letter] that which you asked from me. On the matter of the arrangement of the divorce [*get*], I have already told you that I am doubtful whether it is permitted to arrange a divorce there while the name of the city and the river is not known properly in the Hebrew language.¹¹ Through [the action of] a [rabbinical] court, it is possible to publicly announce [the names of the city and river] at least thirty days prior [to the divorce], and then it would be possible to arrange the divorce, for [the laws of divorce] are like mountains suspended by a hair . . . My opinion is that you seek counsel first with me or with Rabbi Rappoport,¹² if it should happen that you must make a divorce. Do not be in a hurry to depend on yourself [in these matters] . . .

For your installation, prepare some small [halakhic] *pilpul* to speak on at first, and afterwards some *aggadic* subject, for probably [some] will grumble and babble [because of the one subject], others will mutter and be troublesome and babble [because of the other] . . .

I marvel why they do not attempt to get you an apartment. Is it good for you to rot with the synagogue attendant?¹³

You must also remember this: in marriage and divorce [you must] utilize proper witnesses. First of all, they should not be clean shaven. Do

11. Whenever a *get* is issued, the name of the city is specified, and must be absolutely standard on all *gittin* issued in that city.

12. The reference is to Rabbi S. Rappoport of Springfield, Massachusetts, the nearest larger Jewish community to Holyoke.

13. The synagogue attendant of the congregation, Rodphey Shalom, lived in an apartment located in the synagogue basement. Albert H. Belsky, "The Jewish Community of Holyoke, Massachusetts, 1920-1940" (Thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1968), p. 56.

not forget the laws of family propinquity [which would disqualify the individuals as witnesses].

The blessed God will save you from any stumbling blocks if you watch out for them and will pray for this.

[These are] the words of your father, who blesses you with all good [things]. Selah! Yudel Rosenberg.

18 Tevet, [5]681 [December 29, 1920]

To his honor, my dear and beloved son, the distinguished rabbi, etc. Mayer Joshua Rosenberg, may his light shine.

With regard to your question [concerning acceptance of a proselyte to Judaism], an exactly similar one in all its details came to me this week, and this is not my first time. The entire order of immersion [of a proselyte] is explained in *Yoreh Deah* chapter 268 . . .

However, in this instance we are not able to judge [this case, regarding acceptance of the proselyte to Judaism, from the aspect of] principle [*le-khathila*] but rather [from the aspect of] the deed having been accomplished [*be-di'avad*]. As [Rabbi Joseph Karo, author of] *Bet Yosef* stated there, everything [is decided] according to the view of the [rabbinic] decisor. If this were not so, then [the potential proselytes] would remain mired in their [status of] gentile, and the family would be considered unfit [to intermarry with Jews].

Therefore, you must do this: First of all you must inform [the proselyte] concerning the principles of Judaism such as the observance of Sabbath and holidays, forbidden foods, and immersion [after] her period, at least after seven days without counting seven “clean” days, for [the observance of the “clean days”] is not a necessity for a female proselyte but only for a Jewish woman [*bat yisrael*] . . .¹⁴

You must see to teach her to recite at least twice daily the verses “Hear O Israel” and “Blessed be the glory of His kingdom for ever and ever,” as well as the blessing for immersion and the blessing for candle lighting. It is good to write for her the blessings in English letters, and she will learn them easily. After she is used to all of this, order your attendant to go with you and one other person so that there will be a court [of three] at the time of immersion . . .

In the matter of [her] marriage [to a Jewish man], it is not necessary to be stringent [regarding the law] that she wait for three months [after her conversion before marrying] . . . since she is already pregnant. Therefore, it is permitted to perform the marriage after the immersion. However, it would be good if they took out a new marriage license in the city of Holyoke, with the new name that will be given her. It is also your responsibility to investigate whether [the prospective groom] has aban-

14. This point seems to refer to the female proselyte's immersion in the *mikveh* for her conversion. After her conversion, her halakhic obligations would be the same as for any other Jewish woman. I am grateful to Rabbi Yaakov Feitman for clarifying this point.

doned Judaism, and ought to be considered an apostate Jew who has repented and needs himself to be immersed and to accept Judaism anew in front of [a court of] three . . .

I permit you to write to me even if you have no [halakhic] question.

Your father, who seeks your peace with heart and soul and asks that you study [halakhic] decisors very diligently.

Second [day of *parshat*] *Va-era* [5]681 [January 3, 1921]

To his honor, my dear son Rabbi Mayer Joshua, may he live [long],

Perhaps you do not receive [halakhic] questions in your city. Therefore, I will ask you every week three questions, and I will see what you will answer me . . .¹⁵

Fourth day of [*parshat*] *Mishpatim*, [5]681 [February 2, 1921]

To his honor my dear and beloved son, the rabbi Mayer Joshua, rabbi and head of the [rabbinical] court in the city of Holyoke,

Do not be astonished at my not writing to you. For, at times, my time is not my own because of the burdens of the issues of the city, and especially after the news that the slaughterers here have united and made peace amongst themselves.¹⁶

Regarding your question on *halizah*:¹⁷ it is a difficult matter. Why do you need this trouble to intervene in a matter of "nakedness" [*ervah*] . . . Indeed in this matter there are many doubtful areas . . .

Thus, if the [widow] had been under a clear understanding that [her husband] had no brother, certainly there is no substance to the words of the witness [to the opposite], and it would be possible to permit her [to marry] even in principle [*le-hathila*]. However, let us see what this "clear understanding" consists of. Someone comes to dwell in a new land without family. Can there [then] be a basis for this understanding? The entire basis for the understanding is the statement of the woman that she never heard from him that he had a brother. We have never seen or heard [such a thing]. Certainly, this is neither a clear nor a strong presumption. Moreover, do we go according to her testimony? From your letter it is clear that she married a man without the permission of a rabbi. Therefore, she must be considered suspect in this matter . . . My son, do not lower yourself to permit her [to marry] in principle. My advice is to write to the rabbi of the [husband's] native city in Europe to ask him to ascertain whether

15. These questions, which became a regular feature of the correspondence, ranged over the gamut of halakhic issues likely to be encountered by a communal rabbi, including *kashrut*, holidays, mourning practices, etc. This seems to be the origin of Mayer Joshua's rabbinic work, *Kur ha-Mivhan*, which consists of just such halakhic questions and answers.

16. For the crisis in Montreal's kosher meat industry and Yudel Rosenberg's role in that crisis, see Ira Robinson, "The Kosher Meat War and the Jewish Community Council of Montreal, 1922-1925," *Journal of Canadian Ethnic Studies*, forthcoming.

17. The ceremony which removes the obligation of the brother of a deceased man to marry his brother's childless widow.

he had a brother. And you, do not be in a hurry to permit [marriage] in such a grave case . . .

Second day of Adar I [5]681 [February 10, 1921]

Life and peace upon the head of my dear beloved son, Rabbi Mayer Joshua Rosenberg, chief of the holy [rabbinical] court of Holyoke, Mass.,

I received your letter with the enclosed money. I was doubly pleased: 1) simply from the money, for the [economic] crisis here is very strong. If the flame has descended upon the “hyssop that springs out of the wall” (I Kings 5, 13) — that is, the merchants, what shall the cedars — the rabbis — do? Secondly, I was pleased that you have begun to keep your pledge which you wrote to me from Warsaw . . . May the blessed God help you to be able to fulfill your pledge to pay the debt from plenty and not from want. I also had pleasure from your responses to the [halakhic] questions [I posed], for they hit the mark.

I would very much like to know whether Rabbi Shprintz from Boston knows who I am. He is [the same] Rabbi Shlomo Baer on whose account there was a great controversy in the city of Tarlow, for he was the rabbi of Tarlow for a half year . . .¹⁸

On the matter of my wife’s trip to you, I am doubtful, for it is a great expense and it is hard to spend in these times. It is true that she wishes to travel for some days, but, in my opinion, if there is no oil for anointing, it is better to stay at home in peace. Therefore, for the moment the matter is suspended . . .

If you are well off, it would be good [for you] to travel to the first¹⁹ [convention] of the *Knesset ha-Rabbanim ha-Ortodoxim* which will soon take place in New York. The chairman is Rabbi Velvel Margolis. Doubtless, they will ask you to be a member of their organization, and naturally this is not a defect.

Fifth day of [*parshat*] *Va-yakhel* [5]681 [March 3, 1921]

In New York . . . on the Sabbath there gathered hassidim who were “speckled, spotted and striped” (Genesis 30, 39). I did not give a sermon [*derashah*] because I felt weak. On Sunday, when I returned to my house, I was suddenly very sick, and they needed to call the doctor. Thank God I got a little better slowly, and now I am healthy but a little weak . . .

Why don’t you listen to me and buy a vaporizer [*shpritz mashinke*] for [your] nose. This is very bad!

18. Yudel Rosenberg was rabbi of the town of Tarlow, in Poland, in the 1880s. See Robinson, *A Kabbalist in Montreal*, chapter 2.

19. This convention was held in New York on February 22-24, 1921. On this organization and its leader, see Joshua Hoffman (Bernard Revel Graduate School, Yeshiva University), “Rabbi Gavriel Zev Margolis and the Knesset ha-Rabbonim,” unpublished paper. Yudel Rosenberg became vice-president of the Knesset ha-Rabbonim.

11 Kislev, [5]682 [December 12, 1921]

My dear son! I was not greatly pleased when I read your letter. I do not understand why you are angry . . . Son, don't you know that there is no Orthodox rabbi who does not have enemies and opponents, for the sons of Korah have not died.²⁰ Only the rabbis of Esau²¹ sit peacefully, for they see their prosperity in their lifetimes. You should know that the rabbis of Europe also do not lick honey . . . Do not take a public stand against such men . . .

Now essentially . . . you should make a halfway decision that [that man] should at least pray one morning prayer [*shaharit*] or a little more. However, if he is not acceptable to the congregation in any way, what could you do?

Also, with regard to the slaughterer who skins the animals, this is certainly not a good thing; however, it does not disqualify [him] from slaughtering, for in former days the butcher did everything. However, in these days it is a great degradation for a Torah scholar [*ben Torah*].²² It is an even greater shame for the members of the community that they do not see to it that he can make a living in another way. How is the rabbi at fault here?

You wrote seeking a letter from Rabbi [Velvel] Margolis. It is better that you yourself should write to him . . . with a question if, according to [Jewish] law, one must disqualify a slaughterer because he acts as a skinner in the slaughterhouse, since [the income from] slaughtering is small and he cannot make a living [otherwise].

With regard to the questions concerning the laws of mourning, know, my son, that in these lands the rabbi has to be very expert in these laws, for the community members fear only the dead, and observe these commandments very punctiliously . . . therefore, study it and study it again . . .

The words of your father who writes in haste and blesses you . . . may your enemies be as the chaff before the wind . . .

Third [day] of [*parshat*] *Va-era* [5]683 [January 16, 1923]

Concerning your question whether it is permissible to call to *maftir* on *parshat Zakhor* a child who was to be made Bar Mitzvah on that Sabbath . . . [Doing such a thing is halakhically doubtful;²³ however] in any case

20. Cf. Numbers 26:11. Korah, of course, was the rival and enemy of Moses.

21. In Genesis 33:9, where Esau says to his brother, "*Yesh li rav*." While this is normally translated, "I have enough," it can be construed in Hebrew as "I have a rabbi." Yudel Rosenberg humorously applied the latter mistranslation to Reform rabbis, who ministered to the "Esau" (as he called them) of his day.

22. Ritual slaughter was one of the few professions open in America to Jews who, though learned in Torah, could not gain a rabbinical post.

23. The doubt stems from the fact that the scriptural reading of that *maftir*, dealing with remembering Amalek, was considered a Biblical [*de'Orayta*] commandment, and, hence, one that ought not be performed by a minor.

America will not be destroyed if he will not say . . . [the *maftir*] himself, and, similarly, it will not be destroyed if the opposite [takes place]. This is not in the category of the [greatest] sins of America.

Concerning your question if it is permissible to call a boy of fourteen for *maftir* on Rosh ha-Shanah . . . [even though there is an opinion] that because of the honor of the day one should call a man who is important and married . . . for the sake of preventing strife one certainly should not be strict. In my opinion, the opposite [way — i.e., calling up the boy — is better] for because of our many sins, in these cities the young boys are more important than [congregational] presidents, since their sins are fewer. [This is] a word to the wise.

First [day] [*parshat*] *Ekev*, [5]683 [July 29, 1923]

. . . Now I am very busy. There are rabbis here for a *Din Torah*.²⁴ From our side, Rabbi Graubart²⁵ and from their side someone — [you call him] a rabbi? His name is Epstein from the city of Saini Shmegugel [sic].²⁶ He has a spark from the soul of Balaam. In the end [the rabbis] returned home without a *Din Torah*. The obstacle was not from our side but from their side, and the dispute has not quieted.

With regard to the woman proselyte, everything is explained in *Yoreh Deah* chapter 268. I will tell you one rule, that, since three children have already been born, it is necessary to judge *de facto* and not in principle. What can we do, since we are in America and there are many such [cases]. However, [should this case be judged] on principle, it would be best to take [yourself] off this [case] and let them go to hell [*la-azazel*]. The children need immersion and the giving of a name; however, now they are small, and it is necessary to wait some years until it will be possible to immerse them . . .

Epilogue

Rabbi Mayer Joshua Rosenberg remained in Holyoke until 1923.²⁷ He subsequently served as rabbi in various cities in New Jersey and Connecticut. Along the way he acquired his B.A. as well as an M.A. in Education from New York University, and published his thesis, "The Historical Development of Hebrew Education From Ancient Times to 135 C.E.," as a book in 1927.²⁸

He also published a book in two volumes entitled *Kur ha-Mivhan* (The Crucible of Testing), which consists of a series of halakhic questions and

24. On this incident, see Robinson, "Kosher Meat War."

25. Rabbi Yehuda Leib Graubart of Toronto. He succeeded Yudel Rosenberg as rabbi of Toronto's Polish synagogue.

26. Rabbi Hayyim Fishel Epstein of St. Louis, Missouri.

27. Belsky, "Jewish Community of Holyoke," p. 4.

28. Long Branch, New Jersey, 1927.

answers, much the same as his father subjected him to in his Holyoke years, designed for rabbinical students preparing for their *semihah* (ordination) examinations.²⁹

Rosenberg, who had been prevented from achieving his goal of settling in the Land of Israel once, prepared to do so again in 1929. Once more, a major economic catastrophe, the Stock Market crash of 1929, which wiped out his savings, foiled his plans and he remained, until his death in 1940, in the role he had begun learning in Holyoke, Massachusetts in 1920, that of an Orthodox rabbi in America.

29. The book was originally published in three parts: laws of *Melilah* [salting] (Sieni, 1929); laws of Meat and Milk (Bilgoraj, 1932); and laws of *Ta'arovot* [mixtures] (Bilgoraj, 1937). These were reprinted in two volumes in two editions (Jerusalem 1968 and 1978). A fourth volume, covering laws of *Terefot* (non-Kosher foods) was to have been published in Warsaw in 1939. Both the edition and the manuscripts were victims of the Nazi invasion of Poland.

Messianism Reconsidered

GILBERT S. ROSENTHAL

I.

"TO THE THREE GOOD GIFTS WHICH THE people of Israel have left as an inheritance to the entire world: monotheism, refined morality and the prophets of truth and righteousness — a fourth gift must be added: *belief in the Messiah*." So wrote Professor Joseph Klausner in his monumental study of Judaism's messianic idea. Without Israel's messianic concept, there would probably be no Jews left on earth, for were it not for the optimistic dream of, and undying hope in, a bright future despite the bleak and tragic present, the Jewish people would doubtless have long ago assimilated into the ranks of their oppressors and conquerors. And, without Israel's messianic concept, neither Christianity nor Islam would have come into being. As long as a people nurtures hope in the future, it can withstand even the most deadly blows; once it despairs, it loses its collective will to survive. The messianic vision enabled Jews to sustain the worst, and reach our times.¹

Jewish messianism, like so many other theological concepts in Judaism, is complex, contradictory, and confusing. The typical bipolarity of other basic Jewish ideas is acutely obvious to the student of Jewish messianism. In Jewish theology we detect tensions between God's love and His justice; between man's evil urge and the good urge; between this-worldliness and other-worldliness; between love of God and fear of God. So it is with the Jewish concept of messianism: we perceive the tension between a personal messiah and a messianic age; between catastrophe and

1. Basic literature on the messianic idea in Judaism includes Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955); Abba Hillel Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959); R.H. Charles, *Eschatology: The Doctrine of a Future Life in Israel, Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963); Yehezkel Kaufmann, *Toledot Ha-Emunah Ha-Yisraelit* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1953), III, 626-656 and *passim*; A. Marmorstein, *Studies in Jewish Theology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), pp. 16-76; E.E. Urbach, *Ha'azal* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1969), pp. 585-623; Yehudah Ibn Shmuel, *Midreshei Ge'ulah* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 5714); Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (7 Vols.; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1954); Shmuel Ream (ed.), *Ha-Rayon Ha-Meshihi be-Yisrael* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982); Louis Jacobs, *Principles of the Jewish Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), pp. 368-397, and *idem.*, *A Jewish Theology* (New York: Behrman House, 1973), pp. 292-300; Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971).

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utopianism; between the supernatural and the natural. This ambivalence makes our understanding of the messianic ideal so much more difficult while, at the same time, it offers us richly varied options of belief.

II.

The messianic concept was born in Israel's seedbed, namely, the Bible. The ancient Hebrews believed that political defeats, natural calamities and spiritual reversals were all attributable to moral and ritual sin. Only by means of repentance could the scales of justice be righted; only by reconciliation with God could atonement be achieved and salvation obtained. The cycle was simple: sin leads to Divine punishment, which elicits repentance, which, in turn, evokes God's forgiveness, including political salvation and material and spiritual blessing.

There were times in Israel's youth when hope for salvation and political security seemed but a remote dream, material well-being a distant goal, and freedom an unattainable ideal. Such depths of despair were reached in the era of Egyptian slavery. A similar mood of despair marked the epoch of the Judges. The blackest mood of hopelessness set in during the age of the Babylonian Exile, when it appeared that all was lost, that hope was dead, that Israel, in Ezekiel's matchless words, was but a fossil, a people of dry bones. Similar moods of depression and despair gripped our ancestors in Maccabean times and, in post-Biblical days, in the era of the Roman Wars and medieval calamities. It was as a result of calamities such as slavery and war, defeat in battle, or natural catastrophe, that the yearning for a strong savior was born. This savior would be "anointed" (*mashiah*) to perform his saving mission of restoring Israel to its sovereignty and land, even as the priest or prophet or king was anointed with sacred oil as a symbol of Divine mission or sacred purpose. This is not to be confused with messianism for, in truth, there is no *personal* messiah in the Bible. Rather, we detect in this notion *soterology*, human messengers or mortal agents, who carry out God's will and pave the way for salvation. In the Bible, God *alone* is the king-redeemer: Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Saul, David, Hezekiah and others were merely his mortal messengers.²

But alongside of the soterological salvation that stressed a personal, real-life savior who would restore political independence and stability to the Jewish people and crush its enemies, we also detect a more worldly, universal, utopian vision that evinced a belief in progress, salvation, human and cosmic redemption, a golden age in the future when humanity as a whole would evolve into a higher state of development; when spiritual bliss will reign; when mankind will be restored to the utopia of the Garden of Eden, and the Golden Age of harmonious nature would be achieved; when nature will be radically altered. Here we see the nascent notion of

2. Both Klausner and Kaufmann underscore this point.

a messianic era, the ideal referred to by the rabbis as *yemot ha-mashiah*, “the days of the messiah.”

III.

The Prophets of Israel nurtured and developed Israel's messianic hopes to the fullest, investing in it richness and variation that would provide a lode to be mined by the sages and scholars, philosophers and mystics. Two basic themes emerged: a belief in a strong, charismatic leader who would serve as God's anointed emissary in leading Israel to national glory; and a belief in a new age or end of time (*aharit ha-yamim*), when God's words would be implanted in the human heart, nature would be altered, violence disappear, and universal peace and justice would reign supreme. This new era will be capped by a final, permanent era of good, when God's will will prevail, His plan for Israel and the nations will be realized, and His kingship will be manifest — never to be obscured again by mankind. The full and final end envisioned by the Bible will include the remission of sin, a new heart for humanity and a new covenant with nature. No other people achieved this fusion of soterology and messianism into eschatology (from the Greek word *eschaton*, “end”). As Professor Kaufmann remarked, “Eschatology is one of the monumental phenomena of the Israelite religion.” And since King David's dynasty was marked by political glory, military success and cultural-religious flourishing, the future savior was usually expected to issue forth from the House of David.³ The Prophets of Israel gave eschatology its fullest expression, each adding a touch of originality.

Amos, the earliest literary prophet, was strongly obsessed with visions of doom that will precede the messianic era. He depicts “The Day of the Lord” as a dreadful day of reckoning for Israel, when nature will be blighted, prophecy cease, and the Torah forgotten.⁴ Hosea adds a new element or two as he views punishment as a means to moral reform. He also anticipates a righteous and successful ruler who would end the anarchy and chaos of Israel's monarchy. Following this, he predicts a change in nature for good and for blessing, and an era of world peace and universal disarmament.⁵

Isaiah combines all of the elements of soterology, messianism and eschatology. He hopes for a strong ruler-savior (doubtless, King Hezekiah), a supreme leader who would exemplify the highest political, spiritual, ethical, and physical qualities:

But a shoot shall grow out of the stump of Jesse,
A twig shall sprout from his stock.
The spirit of the Lord shall alight upon him:

3. Cf. Kaufmann, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 168f. and 290f.

4. Amos 8:8-12 and 9:5.

5. Hosea 2:1f; 3:4f. 13:13 and *passim*.

A spirit of wisdom and insight,
 A spirit of counsel and valor,
 A spirit of devotion and reverence for the Lord:
 He shall not judge by what his eyes behold,
 Nor decide by what his ears perceive.
 Thus he shall judge the poor with equity
 And decide with justice for the lowly of the land.⁶

Man's evil deeds will cause natural and political catastrophes, moving the people to repent and to enjoy spiritual and material well-being, and there will be an in-gathering of the exiles to Israel with an era of abiding peace. Isaiah caps his great visions with a glorious eschatology that envisions an end to wars and human and natural evil, an end to suffering and death, and a radical transformation of nature, with peace and brotherhood triumphant:

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
 The leopard lie down with the kid;
 The calf, the beast of prey and the fatling together,
 With a little boy to herd them.

...
 In all of My sacred mount
 Nothing evil or vile shall be done;
 For the land shall be filled with devotion to the Lord
 As water covers the sea.

...
 In the days to come
 The Mount of the Lord's House
 Shall stand firm above the mountains
 And tower above the hills;
 And all the nations
 Shall gaze on it with joy.
 And many people shall go and say:

"Come,
 Let us go to the Mount of the Lord,
 To the House of the God of Jacob,
 That He may instruct us in His ways,
 And that we may walk in His paths."

For instruction shall come forth from Zion,
 The word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
 Thus He will judge among the nations
 And arbitrate for the many peoples,
 And they shall beat their swords
 into plowshares and their spears into
 pruning hooks:
 Nation shall not take up
 Sword against Nation;
 They shall never again know war.⁷

6. Isaiah 11:1ff.

7. Ibid., 2:1ff.

Micah strongly resembles his older contemporary, Isaiah, adding an important new element: the eschatological remission of sin. In the end of days, man will not perform an act of repentance to gain forgiveness; rather, God will cast the people's sins into the sea and gather them in.⁸

Habakkuk deals with the Jobian question of evil on a national-international scale. His answer to the question, "Why do wicked nations crush righteous nations with impunity?" is novel. Whereas Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah and others call for *teshuvah* and good deeds and yearned for a righteous and resourceful king-general, Habakkuk replies: Man must await the final reckoning, for, in His own good time, God will send forth salvation.⁹ This split between Habakkuk and the other Prophets (unobserved by other students of messianism, to the best of my knowledge) was to become the core of a fundamental dispute that divided the Sages centuries later and, indeed, down to our own times.

Jeremiah follows the teachings of Isaiah and his school, adding the new notion of God's implanting in humanity a new heart on which a new covenant would be engraved so that we will no longer need to teach Torah to one another, for the Torah will be our inherent nature.

See, a time is coming — declares the Lord — when
I will make a new covenant with the
House of Israel and the House of Judah. It will
not be like the covenant I made with their
fathers, when I took them by the hand to
lead them out of the land of Egypt, a
covenant which they broke so that I
rejected them — declares the Lord. But such is
the covenant I will make with the House
of Israel after these days — declares the
Lord: I will put My Teaching into their
inmost being and inscribe it upon their
hearts. Then I will be their God, and they
shall be My people. No longer will they
need to teach one another and say to
one another, "Heed the Lord"; for all of
them, from the least of them to the greatest,
shall heed Me — declares the Lord.¹⁰

Ezekiel's novel insight into redemption is that God will redeem Israel *not* for its sake but for "the sanctification of God's name in the eyes of the gentiles." In fact, he does not even expect man to take the first step of repentance. His extraordinary vision of the valley of dry bones is a prediction of the messianic restoration of the shattered and exiled Israelites. He also introduces an eschatological motif of a catastrophic war of Gog, King of Magog, against Jerusalem as a prelude to the new age, and he con-

8. Micah 7:19.

9. Habakkuk 2:3f. and 14.

10. Jeremiah 31:30ff.

cludes his prophecy with a utopian vision of a “miniature, messianic priestly code” for the new Jerusalem.¹¹

Deutero-Isaiah is saturated with messianism, eschatology, and even apocalyptic messages. His most remarkable contribution is the visionary depiction of the “suffering servant of the Lord” — a vision so pregnant with meaning, particularly for Christian theology. He looks forward to a future conversion of pagans to the service of YHWH, and envisions Jerusalem as a world capital to which nations will come to pray.¹²

The last of the Prophets, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, also developed special views of soterology and messianism. Haggai and Zechariah viewed Zerubabel as the promised Davidite leader who would restore political greatness to Israel and usher in an era of material, spiritual and political prosperity.¹³ Zechariah’s view of a king riding into Jerusalem would have a profound impact on Judaism and Christianity:

Rejoice greatly, Fair Zion;
Raise a shout, Fair Jerusalem!
Lo, Your King is coming to you.
He is victorious, triumphant,
Yet humble, riding on an ass,
On a donkey foaled by a she-ass.
He shall banish chariots from Ephraim
And horses from Jerusalem;
The warrior’s bow shall be banished.
He shall call on the nations to surrender,
And His rule shall extend from sea to sea
And from ocean to land’s end.¹⁴

Malachi injects the notion that Elijah would play a role in the final redemption:

Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to
You before the coming of the awesome,
fearful day of the Lord. He shall reconcile
parents with children and children
with their parents, so that, when I come,
I do not strike the whole land with
utter destruction.¹⁵

In Daniel, Michael serves as the Divine messenger who will be capable of resurrecting the dead.¹⁶ But it is Elijah who was ultimately assigned by subsequent generations to be the harbinger of glad tidings and messianic fulfillment. Thus, in the last of the Prophets, the notion of a supernatural messiah-redeemer or apostolic prophet-messiah takes shape, and prophecy and messianism are combined into one.

11. Ezekiel 36:20ff.; 37:1-14; 38 and 39; 40-48.

12. Isaiah 40-48; 53:1ff.; 56:6-9; 59:21; 60-66.

13. Haggai 2:20-23; Zechariah 2:14ff.; 3:8ff; 4:6ff.; 6:12; 14:12ff.

14. Zechariah 9:9-10; cf. Matthew 21:4-5.

15. Malachi 3:22-24.

16. Daniel 12:1ff.

Finally, Wisdom Literature is notably lacking in messianism and eschatology. Our teacher, Dr. Robert Gordis, has written that this is due to the upper-class, utilitarian, this-worldly background of this genre of Biblical literature. Indeed, we find in books such as *Koheleth* and *Job* a proto-Sadducean view of life and death which does not contemplate an afterlife or resurrection, nor even any messianic hope.¹⁷ Ultimately, it is Prophetic — not Wisdom — Judaism that was to capture the Jewish mind and heart, as we shall now see.

III.

In rabbinic literature we find a continuation of the dual themes or bi-polarity already evident in the Bible. Some sages believed in a personal messiah; others prayed for a messianic era. Some viewed the process as a supernatural one, while others believed in a natural one. Some stressed the catastrophic element of messianism, while others emphasized the restorative and utopian aspect. Some sages strove to calculate the date of the messianic arrival, while others sharply discouraged such speculation. Some viewed messianism in a nationalistic, parochial setting; others adopted a universalistic, cosmic stance. Some believed that the messiah would abolish or alter the halakhah, while others cautioned that not a single law would be changed. Some rabbis believed that no matter what we humans do, God has set the time of redemption; others stressed the human role in hastening the last coming. These deeply ambivalent trends continued through the ages and, indeed, are very much evident in our own days.

The literature of the apocrypha and pseudopigrapha, as well as the Dead Sea Scrolls, bridges Biblical and rabbinic literature, and is rife with messianic speculation. It represents a combination of soterology with a personal messiah who is the supernatural apostle of God, and develops views already adumbrated in Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and Daniel. Indeed, two messiahs are described: one, from either the tribe of Joseph or Levi, who will be transitory, will set the stage for full redemption, and will die in battle against the pagans; the other, of the Davidic dynasty, who will be the authentic messiah, destined to usher in *yemot-ha-mashiah*, and *olam ha-ba*, the messianic era and the world or age to come.¹⁸

17. Robert Gordis, *Koheleth — The Man and His World* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1951), pp. 33ff.; "The Social Background of Wisdom Literature," reprinted in his *Poets, Prophets and Sages* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. 175-183.

18. See *Sukkah* 52a (based on Zechariah 12:10) and parallels. Cf. Charles, *Op., cit.*, pp. 233f. The notion of dual messiahs is also found in the literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Cf. William S. LaSor, "The Messianic Idea in Qumran," *Studies and Essays in Honor of A.A. Neuman*, M. Ben-Horin, B.D. Weinryb and Solomon Zeitlin, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1962), pp. 343-364. Klausner views messiah ben Joseph as a political leader, and messiah ben David as a spiritual head, while Scholem views the former as the "catastrophic" messiah and the latter as the "utopian" messiah. Cf. Urbach, *Op., cit.*, p. 592 n. 28.

In rabbinic literature, there is wide and richly imaginative speculation about the “Messiah, Son of David,” his origin, name, physical attributes, birthdate, character, and mission. Indeed, there is much confusion, contradiction and ambiguity of terms.¹⁹ But several debates are significant because they bespeak a fundamental difference in philosophy about messianism.

One profound and long-abiding debate centers on the question of what would hasten the coming of the messiah (*bi’at ha-mashiah*) and the ultimate redemption (*ge’ulah*). Two great *tannaim* (Talmudic sages up to the second century, C.E.) of the second century followed opposing views. Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus argued that *teshuvah*, repentance, would hasten the coming of the messiah. His activist position was assailed by Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah, who took a passive view, insisting that no action of humans could shorten the time that must elapse before the final salvation. In its own time (*kez*), redemption will come — and not before.²⁰ Scholars are of the opinion that these divergent views stem from the different temperaments and personalities of these two great sages. In my view, the two sages are really expatiating on earlier positions staked out by the Prophets, as we noted earlier. Rabbi Eliezer’s view follows Hosea, Isaiah and their school; Rabbi Joshua wrote in the spirit of Habakkuk.

The Sages aligned themselves with either of these teachers, refining their views and expanding on their teachings. Rabbi Nathan, for example, taught that public prayer, the study of Torah, fasting, and deeds of loving-kindness will bring the redeemer.²¹ Many sages suggested that the observance of specific *mizvot* would hasten the redemption:

- If Israel would observe a single Sabbath properly, the son of David would come at once.²²
- If Israel would repent for one day, immediately the messiah, son of David would come.²³
- He who quotes a saying in the name of its author brings redemption to the world.²⁴

But others insisted that “the messiah will come only after the elapsed time has passed,” no matter what we do or don’t do.²⁵ And some *Tannaim*

19. The terms are confusing and often interchanged, and it is now always clear whether *ben David* refers to the messiah or a descendant of King David. Louis Finkelstein has suggested that the Sages deliberately left the notion of the messianic era and of the age-to-come vague and ill-defined. See his *Introduction to Avot and Avot de Rabbi Natan* [Hebrew] (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1950), pp. 218ff.

20. *Sanhedrin* 97b; J. *Ta’anit* I,1,63d; *Tanhuma Behukotai* (ed. Buber) 5, pp. 110f. Urbach, *Op. cit.*, pp. 601ff. argues that R. Joshua does not negate the power of redemption. Rather, the debate is really whether the “end” (*kez*) has been set or not: R. Joshua believed it was set; R. Eliezer maintained it was not set, and that repentance is “an absolute value of its own.” I find his argument unsubstantiated and unconvincing.

21. *Berakhot* 8a.

22. *Mekhilta Va-yasa* (ed. Lauterbach), II, 120 and *Pisha* I,33; *Shabbat* 118a; *Exodus Rabbah* 5:18 and parallels.

23. *Sanhedrin* 97b; J. *Ta’anit* I,1,64a.

24. *Avot* VI,6.

and *Amoraim* (Talmudic sages up to the sixth century, C.E.) synthesized the two views:

Humanity will be redeemed through repentance, and the observance of *mizvot*, God's compassion, the merit of the fathers, extreme suffering, and the elapsing of the appointed time (*kez*).²⁶

It is noteworthy that this fundamental split continued down through the ages, so that the false messiahs and messianic agitators, as well as modern Zionists, were actually developing themes composed by Rabbi Eliezer, while others of the more passive type (including the Satmar Hasidim) truly belong in Rabbi Joshua's camp.

Another controversy developed around the question of whether sin or virtue would bring redemption. One school of thought held that only when Israel is fully purified will the messiah come. The opponents argued that only when Israel sinks to the depths of depravity and sinfulness will He reveal himself. Still another opinion insisted that Israel's redemption would come when the people would be utterly shattered and scattered to the four corners of the earth, when the "pangs of the messiah" will be most grievous and the "evil empire" will seem to triumph, when Torah will be forgotten and insolence and impudence overwhelm courtesy and respect. "When we will all despair of redemption, then he will come," mused one sage.²⁷

The Sages battled over calculations of the date of his coming. One group searched Scripture for clues, and indulged in all sorts of numerology (*gematriah*) in seeking the true date. Others cautioned soberly, "Cursed be those who calculate the end." They also debated the duration of the messianic era, and figures range from forty years to 365,000 years! But all agreed that *yemot ha-mashiah* (the era of the messiah) will be limited and transitory, a prelude to the *olam ha-ba* (the age or world to come).²⁸

The scholars of Talmud and Midrash indulged in wild speculation as to the radical changes in nature that the messiah will precipitate. Thus we read:

In this world grain is produced after six months and trees grow fruit after twelve months. In the age to come, grain will be produced after one month and trees will grow fruit after two months. Rabbi Jose said that grain will be produced in fifteen days and trees will bear fruit in one month.²⁹

The sick and blind will be healed and death will be conquered; sin will disappear, and humanity will return to a pristine, Eden-like state, with the righteous feasting at a banquet of mythical proportions.³⁰ But the other

25. *Sanhedrin* 97b-98a; *Tanḥuma Be-Hukotai* (ed. Buber) 5, p. 111.

26. J. *Ta'anit* I,1,63d; *Midrash Psalms* (ed. Buber), 106, p. 457 and parallels.

27. J. *Ta'anit* I,1,63d; *Midrash Psalms* 45, p. 269; *Sanhedrin* 97a and 98b; *Yoma* 10a; *Avodah Zarah* (A.Z.) 5a and *passim*.

28. *Pesahim* 54b; *Ketubot* 111a; *Sanhedrin* 99a; A.Z. 9a; *Sifre Deuteronomy* 310, p. 134.

29. J. *Ta'anit* I,1,64a; *Ketubot* 111b; *Shabbat* 30b.

30. *Genesis Rabbah* 12:6; *Leviticus Rabbah* 9:7.

school of thought rejected this fanciful approach. In the words of Mar Samuel:

There is no difference between this world and the next except that political tyranny and oppression will disappear.³¹

Both the particularistic and universalistic positions were upheld by the Sages. Some stressed that the messiah would bring the dispersed Israelites home to Jerusalem and Zion and rebuild the Temple, while others maintained that he would usher in an era of freedom and peace for all humanity. Jerusalem will serve as a spiritual center, with the pagan nations joining in recognizing His sovereignty. The crowning achievement will be the resurrection of the dead (an authentic Jewish dogma) followed by the last judgment.³²

It is noteworthy that the Sages differed over the role of Torah and *mizvot* in the messianic age. Some argued that the messiah will abolish the Torah and *mizvot* and issue a new Torah and set of laws. "In the days of the messiah the pig will be kosher," runs one adage. But others insisted that *no* new Torah and commandments will be legislated by the messiah.³³ Of course, the notion of a new Torah and commandments was pregnant with dangerous ramifications and anti-nomianism. Indeed, Paul expanded and built on this teaching, and created a new faith even as later mystics and pseudo-messiahs (notably, Shabbetai Zvi and Jacob Frank) shook normative Judaism with such heretical notions.³⁴

Those who maintained a personal messianic view followed the path of supernaturalism. They taught, for example, that Elijah, already connected with messianic redemption by the Prophet Malachi, as we have previously noted, will play a key role in announcing the coming of the savior. Along with Moses, he will serve at the messianic banquet; he will help restore the lost and exiled tribes; he will induce the people to repent, settle legal disputes, and introduce harmony and peace; he will trumpet the coming of messiah, and assist in resurrecting the dead. Some went so far as to identify Elijah with the messiah.³⁵

The school of personal messianists also expatiated on the notion of two messiahs: one, of the tribe of Joseph, who will prepare the way for the true messiah and die in battle; and the final messiah, the son of David, to follow and bring ultimate salvation. This curious belief persisted

31. *Berakhot* 34b.

32. *Exodus Rabbah* 15:21; *J. Berakhot* II,4,5a; *Seder Eliahu Rabbah* (ed. Ish Shalom) 6, p. 29; *Tanhuma Noah*, p. 56; *Sanhedrin* 99b; *Pesahim* 68a; *Shabbat* 63a and *passim*. On the dogma of resurrection see *M. Sanhedrin* X,1 and *M. Berakhot* V,2.

33. *Genesis Rabbah* 98:9; *Leviticus Rabbah* 13:3; *Koheleth Rabbah* 11:8; *Midrash Psalms* 21, p. 177; *Niddah* 61b; *Midrash Psalms* 146, p. 535, and *passim*.

34. Cf. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, pp. 24ff., 40ff., 58-67, 78-141; *Shabbetai Zvi* (2 vols. Hebrew. Tel Aviv: Am Oved., 1957), *passim*.

35. *M. Eduyot* VIII, 7; *M. B.M.* I, 8; *M. Sotah* IX, 15; *Sanhedrin* 48a; *Menahot* 45a and *passim*.

through the Middle Ages, and flowered in the personalities and missions of Abbu Isa, David Reuveni, Shlomo Molkho, and the grand charlatan of them all, Shabbetai Zvi.³⁶

But many sages who confronted the spectacle of a series of false messiahs in Roman times, and, especially, the phenomenon of Jesus and the new Christian sect, struggled to de-personalize the concept or, at least, play it down and dilute it. When Rabbi Akivah openly supported the messianic pretensions of Shimon ben Kozeba, he was severely chided by Rabbi Yohanan ben Torta.³⁷ Rabbi Hillel (fourth century C.E.) taught that there would be no messiah for Israel, since “they had already enjoyed him in the days of King Hezekiah” (eighth century B.C.E.).³⁸ Others went to great lengths to underscore the fact that our redeemer is God — not a flesh-and-blood-person or supernatural messenger. Some insisted that God, not the messiah, will gather the exiles to Zion. Rabbi Helbo, Rabbi Yohanan and Rabbi Samuel bar Nahmani stressed that God alone, not an angel or messenger, not Elijah or the messiah, will redeem Israel.³⁹ A number of passages emphasize this view:

“In You, Lord, do I trust.” This means that just as the Passover redemption was by God, so, too, will the ultimate redemption be by God alone, and it will be the complete redemption.⁴⁰

Who is the King Messiah? The Lord is His name.⁴¹

Said Israel to the Holy One, blessed be He, “Have you not redeemed us through Moses and Joshua, through the judges and kings, and yet we are still enslaved and ashamed as if we were never redeemed?” Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to them: “Since your previous redemptions came via flesh and blood redeemers, and your leaders were mere mortals who are here today and in the grave tomorrow, your redemption was merely temporary. But in the future, I myself will redeem you for I am forever, and My redemption will last forever.”⁴²

Clearly, many sages tried to curb messianic speculation and de-personalize the messianic concept, for sound historical and theological reasons. Privately, they probably believed in a personal messiah; publicly, they adopted a different stance.

36. *Sukkah* 52a and *J. Sukkah* V, 2, 55b; *Baba Batra* 123b; *Seder Eliahu Rabbah* 18, pp. 97f. and notably in medieval *midrashim*. Cf. B.Z. Dinur, *Yisrael Ba-Golah* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1962), I, 2, pp. 193-281.

37. *J. Ta'anit* IV, 5, 68d; *Lamentations Rabbati* II, 4, 21a.

38. *Sanhedrin* 99a. But note Rashi's explanation: “But the Holy One, blessed be He, will rule and redeem them alone and by Himself.” Cf. *Berakhot* 28b where Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai speaks of Hezekiah as the messiah.

39. *Midrash Psalms* 107, p. 461; 18, p. 139; *Pesikta de Rav Kahane*, p. 106b.

40. *Midrash Psalms* 31, p. 237; 107, p. 462.

41. *Lamentations Rabbati*, I, 51, 18b.

42. *Midrash Psalms* 31, p. 237.

IV.

The truth of this last assertion can be verified if we remember that the Talmud and *Midrashim* do not represent a crystallized, normative Jewish theology but, rather, an inchoate, evolving theology. The official and normative Jewish theology and, indeed, practice, are contained in the prayers and prayer books, in the liturgy of the synagogue. Liturgy is crystallized religion and theology. Remarkably, Jewish liturgy is relatively free of personal messianism.

The Haggadah of Passover, for example, is one of our earliest liturgical creations. It surely was no accident that Moses is missing (except for one casual reference) from the redemption text *par excellence*, and that to God alone is assigned the role of savior. In what seems to be an anti-Christological passage, we read:

“And the Eternal brought us out of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 26:8) — not by an angel, not by a seraph, not by a messenger, but the Holy One, blessed be He, in His own glory and by Himself, as it is said, “And I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and I will smite all the first born in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:12) . . . I and not the messenger . . . I am He and none other.⁴³

The *Amidah*, the prayer *par excellence* (*ha-tefillah*), contains but one clear reference to a personal messiah and several references to messianic times. The end of the first blessing appeals to God to bring the Redeemer (*go'el*). But even here the usual term, *Mashiah ben David*, is missing, and immediately the liturgy dilutes the notion by proclaiming that “God saves and redeems and resurrects the dead.” In all of the blessings of the *Amidah*, it is God who is our savior, healer, and redeemer; He will sound the *shofar* of freedom (not Elijah!) and gather the exiles from the four corners of the earth; He will destroy Israel's enemies; He will return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city, restoring the dynasty of David. Even the messianic allusions in the fourteenth and fifteenth benedictions are hazy.

Likewise, the blessings before the *Shema* are replete with an almost repetitive theme of God alone as savior and redeemer. Both the *Kaddish* and *Aleynu* prayers look forward to the day when God will establish His Kingship, and all humans will acknowledge Him.⁴⁴ A similar phenomenon is evident in the Sabbath, Festival, and High Holiday services. God alone is the king and savior; He alone will gather the exiles, resurrect the dead, rule in Zion, redeem His people, and rebuild the Temple; He alone will reign over a united human race. Two *Amoraic* prayers from the daily and Sabbath liturgy seem to sum up the matter cogently:

May we be worthy to live and see and inherit goodness and blessing in the days of the messiah and in the life of the age to come.

43. *Haggadah*, ed. Kasher (New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1950), pp. 53f. Cf. *Mekhilta Pisha* I, 97.

44. To be sure, the Sephardic version of the *Kaddish* inserts the phrase, “may He cause His salvation to flourish and bring close His messiah.”

There is none like You, Lord, in this world, nor is there any king beside You in the life of the age to come. There is no redeemer besides You in the days of the messiah, and there is nothing to compare to You as our savior in the era of the resurrection of the dead.

We could cite other examples to prove that classical rabbinic theology as incorporated in the liturgy played down the element of personal messianism and supernatural redemption by a messiah, reserving that role to God alone. Why did the Sages, who in the academies evinced a keen belief in a personal messiah, virtually expunge it from the official liturgy? They must have been horrified both by the cult of Jesus and the spread of Pauline Christianity, as well as the bloody fiasco of the Bar Kozeba revolt, and they realized the folly of unbridled messianic agitation that could bring only suffering to the people and even breed a cult of human worship.

V.

Medieval Jewish thought reflects all of the hues and variations of the classic Sages, and messianic speculations waxed and waned, depending on the degree of Israel's suffering. Generally, the more Jews were oppressed in Erez Yisrael or the Diaspora, the more messianic fever spread and infected the leaders and masses.

The Jewish philosophers took different paths, even as the rabbinic Sages had arrived at varied messianic positions. Saadia Gaon, for example, borrowed heavily from the more wild, speculative messianic works, and looked to a supernatural personal messiah who would perform miracles and wonders. He wrote that the messiah will come to us whether or not we repent, after Messiah ben Joseph first clears the way and dies in battle. Saadia even sought to calculate the date, based on verses in Daniel. His messianism is personal, supernatural, apocalyptic.⁴⁵

Maimonides, on the other hand, was more of a naturalist who did not stress the personality of a messiah.

The Jew ... must ... believe that the messiah will issue forth from the House of David ... and he shall far excel all rulers in history by his reign, which will be glorious in justice and peace. Neither impatience nor deceptive calculation of the time of the advent of the messiah should shatter this belief. Still ... he must be regarded as a mortal being like any other and only a restorer of the Davidic dynasty. He will die and leave a son as his successor, who will in turn die and leave the throne to his heir. Nor will there be any material change in the order of things in the whole system of nature and human life; accordingly, Isaiah's picture of the living together of lamb and wolf cannot be taken literally but are metaphors ...⁴⁶

45. Saadia Gaon, *Emunot Ve-De'ot*, VIII, 3, 5, 6 and 7, tr. Samuel Rosenblatt, pp.290ff. and 304-312.

46. Maimonides, *Introduction* to his Commentary on *Sanhedrin* X, ed. Rabinowitz (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1960), pp. 110-136; *Yad Melakhim*, xi and xii; *Teshuvah*, viii and ix.

Maimonides suggests that the messianic kingdom will bring Israel its political independence but not the subjugation of heathen nations. The Jewish people will enjoy an era of affluence and peace and devote themselves to the carefree study of Torah and “lead all mankind to the knowledge of God and help them share in the eternal bliss of the age to come.” In his famous *Letter to Yemen* (1171), Maimonides speaks of the messiah as a very eminent prophet, more illustrious than all the prophets after Moses, of the stock of Solomon, son of David. He cautions that if a prophet urges us to follow him, we demand a miracle. If he performs it, we recognize him; if not, he is put to death. If he teaches doctrines that negate the doctrines of Moses, we repudiate him. Then he adds quite remarkably:

I do not know the date of his coming. But I am in possession of an extraordinary tradition from my father, going back to early ancestors exiled from Jerusalem, that prophecy [a necessary forerunner to the messiah] will be restored in the year 1210.⁴⁷

Nor should we forget that Maimonides included a belief in the coming of the messiah in his thirteen principles of faith.⁴⁸

Nahmanides was a Kabbalist and mystic who surely accepted the concept of a messiah but was very circumspect about the notion, and cautioned against seeking to uncover the date of redemption. In his great debate with Pablo Christiani at Barcelona in 1263, he described the messiah as merely a king of flesh and blood, as is the king of Spain. The messiah, however, will reign over the entire world and bring the knowledge of God to the human heart and universal peace.⁴⁹ In his *Sefer Ha-Ge'ulah*, he suggests:

The goal of our salvation is not the days of the messiah and sensual pleasures such as eating choice fruits, bathing in the hot springs of Tiberias and similar pleasures, nor even the offering of sacrifices and service in the Temple . . . Rather, . . . we think of saving our souls from Hell . . . and coming closer to God in the Temple with its priests and prophets in the Chosen Land where the *Shekhinah* dwells more tangibly than in the Diaspora, where our proximity

47. *Letter to Yemen*, ed. by Abraham Halkin, tr. by Boaz Cohen (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1952), pp. 50, 54, 58, 82, 86f. Did Maimonides believe that he himself had achieved prophecy and, consequently, would be a harbinger of the messiah? Abraham Joshua Heschel suggested that Maimonides evidently was convinced of his prophetic powers. See Heschel, “Did Maimonides Believe That He Had Achieved Prophecy?” *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume*, Saul Lieberman, Alexander Marx, Shalom Spiegel and Solomon Zeitlin, eds. (2 vols., New York: The American Academy for Jewish Research, 1946), Hebrew Section, pp. 159-188.

48. I refer to Maimonides’ oft-quoted, *Ani Ma’amin*, “I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the messiah and, although he tarry, still do I believe in him.” See his *Introduction* to Chapter X of *Sanhedrin* in Rabinowitz’s ed., pp. 147ff. The Thirteen Principles of Faith were deftly set as a liturgical poem by Daniel ben Yehudah of Rome (fourteenth century) in his well-known liturgical poem, *Yigdal*.

49. Cf. the summary of the debate in *Kol Kitvei Ramban*, ed. by Charles Chavel (2 vols. Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1963), I, par. 47, pp. 310f.

to the impure gentiles leads us to sin. In the days of the messiah, the evil urge will be abolished so that we may attain the profound truth.⁵⁰

Albo noted that Maimonides had listed the messianic belief as an *ikkar*, a fundamental belief of the faith, the denial of which makes one a "heretic," who loses his share in the world to come. He rejected Maimonides' view, citing Rabbi Hillel, who, as we noted, believed Hezekiah to have been the messiah, "and yet he was not classed as an unbeliever." Albo did accept the messianic idea as an important article of faith, but not a dogma or essential belief.⁵¹

The Kabbalah followed the patterns of rabbinic Judaism. All of the elements are present: future disasters, natural calamities, the redemption, the in-gathering of the exiles, miracles in nature, and the explication of the secrets of the Torah. But the element of anti-nomianism that had only been hinted at in rabbinic literature assumes greater dimensions in the Kabbalah.⁵²

Lurianic Kabbalah took a new turn. Gershom Scholem has described it as a "messianism pervading mysticism," as an answer to the tragedy of the Spanish and Portuguese expulsion. Personal messianism, wrote Scholem, was played down in the Lurianic system;" the whole people of Israel was identified with the messiah, and charged to uncover the sparks of divinity and to remove the shell of sin through the process of *tikkun*.⁵³ But many did believe that Issac Luria was himself the messiah, and Rabbi Haim Vital actually dreamed of meeting the messiah on a mountain west of Safed, who then took him up to the Temple Mount.⁵⁴

Later mystics stressed the notion of "the holy sinner" who would vi-

50. *Sefer Ha-Ge'ulah* in *Kol Kitvei Ramban*, II, part 2, pp. 289ff.

51. Albo, *Ikkarim*, ed. Husik (3 vols. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1949), I, 1, pp. 43-48. Yehudah Halevi barely mentions the messiah in his *Kuzari*, III, 19, 65, 73; IV, 15, while Hasdai Crescas follows Maimonides' naturalistic interpretation in his *Or Adonai*, III, 61a-62b. The Hasidim of Ashkenaz (pietists of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) speculated privately about the date of the coming of the messiah, but bridled at public calculations of the date. Cf. *Seder Hasidim*, ed. Margalioth, (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1957), 206, p. 195. See Joseph Dan, *Torat Hasod Shel Hasidut Ashkenaz* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1968), pp. 241ff. Dan interprets this to mean that they stressed individual rather than collective salvation.

52. Cf., e.g., Zohar Genesis I, 118a and 119a; Exodus II, 8a; Leviticus II, 23a; Numbers II, 30a, and *passim*. Cf. Yehuda Liebes, "Ha-Mashiah shel Ha-Zohar Le-Demuto Ha-Meshihit shel R. Shimeon bar Yohai," in *Ha-Rayon Ha-Meshihi be-Yisrael*, in n.1, pp. 87-236.

53. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, pp. 46ff.; *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), pp. 244ff. and 333ff. But Moshe Idel disagrees with Scholem's historiosophy. Cf. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 266f.

54. Haim Vital, *Sefer Ha-Hezyonot* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1954), 2, p. 41. Note the allusions to a personal messiah in Shlomo Alkabetz's popular sixteenth century Sabbath eve poem, *Lekha Dodi*, stanzas four and eight. In the light of these and other facts, Idel seems correct in urging that, "The nature and extent of messianism in Lurianism is a matter that still needs to be analyzed in detail." Cf. his *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 394, n. 32.

olate the *mizvot* in order to pave the way for the messiah. New interpretations of the Torah and a freedom from taboos (such as sexual ones) marked the approach of Shabbetai Zvi and Jacob Frank and led to disastrous results.⁵⁵

Early Hasidism seems to have “neutralized” the personality of the messiah by stressing the inner revival of the Jew in exile. However, later Hasidism restored personal messianism, even to the point of extolling the *zaddik* or rebbe to the extreme of adulation, hinting that the *zaddik* is certainly a harbinger of the messiah, if not the messiah himself.⁵⁶

VI.

The messianic idea has been assessed and reassessed in modern times. Reform Judaism reinterpreted it in its Pittsburgh Platform of 1885:

We recognize in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect the approaching of the realization of Israel's great messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men.

The Movement depersonalized the concept, changing liturgical references from a “redeemer” (*go'el*) to “redemption” (*ge'ulah*). In its “Centenary Perspective” of 1976, the Reform Movement declared:

We have learned again that the survival of the Jewish people is of highest priority, and that in carrying out our Jewish responsibilities we help move humanity toward its messianic fulfillment.⁵⁷

Mordecai M. Kaplan also rejected the notion of a personal messiah as supernaturalism, retaining, instead, a belief in human progress towards redemption of humanity. He taught his Reconstructionist philosophy of human history as the evolutionary process of human progress to a higher stage of human development, “a higher type of man.”⁵⁸

Conservative Judaism has followed a similar, non-personalized messianic route. Unlike Reform and Reconstructionism, its liturgy retains the traditional messianic Hebrew wording, but, in truth, it espouses the notion of a messianic era rather than a person. In its *Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism* (1990), edited by Dr. Robert Gordis, the Movement affirmed a “gradualist” or “evolutionary” eschatological approach:

We do not know when the messiah will come, nor whether he will be a charismatic figure or is a symbol of the redemption of humankind from the evil of the world. Through the doctrine of a messianic figure, Judaism teaches us that every individual human being must live as if he or she, individually, has the responsibility to bring about the messianic age. Beyond that, we echo

55. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, pp. 58ff. and, especially, 78-144.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-202. However, Ben Zion Dinur, Isaiah Tishby and Idel disagree on this point. Cf. Idel, *Op. cit.*, p. xvii and *passim*.

57. The texts are conveniently published in Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 386-394.

58. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask* (New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1956), pp. 183f.

the words of Maimonides based on the prophet Habakkuk (2:3) that though he may tarry, yet do we wait for him each day.⁵⁹

Orthodoxy seems to accept the literal meaning of a personal messiah. There are no changes in either the liturgical text or in translations of the messianic passages. Religious Zionists write and speak of the State of Israel as “the beginning of the era of redemption.”⁶⁰ Some Hasidim view their rebbe as either the forerunner of the messiah or imply that he is the messiah himself.⁶¹ Rav Kook, however, took a rather unique position, suggesting that the evolution of humanity to a higher life form represents messianism. Generally, however, Orthodox Jews officially accept the notion of a belief in a personal messiah.⁶²

VII.

Unquestionably, the messianic ideal, while not a dogma, is one of the greatest teachings of Judaism. It has imbued us with hope when all seemed lost; it has sustained our spirit when despair gripped us. Yet, personal messianism is fraught with dangers. The nostalgic mystics who call for a return to a personal messiah would undo the wise decision of the Sages, who deliberately downplayed the concept, fearing that we would open the floodgates to charlatans and imposters who would incalculably damage our people. Do we really believe in a superhuman who will come riding on a white ass and battle Israel's enemies in a supernatural fashion? Do we want a fusion of nationalism and religious messianism, knowing how lethal such combinations have proved, both in the past and present? Moreover, we have witnessed the tragedy of Communism, which posed as the secular alternative to traditional messianism, offering “pie in the sky” while enslaving millions. And we have watched secular Zionism strip the rebuilt Israel of its God and Torah while enthroning secular nationalism and socialism. So we must mute the melody of personal messianism, even as did the Sages, while we may not reject *messianism*. Messianism is, and always will be, a vital ingredient of our faith — indeed, of humanity's faith that, despite the hopelessness of the present, tomorrow the sun will shine, “bringing peace and healing in its wings.” As partners of the Holy One, blessed be He, in the process of *tikkun ha-olam*, mending the world, we humans hasten that messianic fulfillment.

59. *Emet Ve-Emunah, Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism* (2nd edition, New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1990), pp. 28-32.

60. In fact, the official “Prayer for the State of Israel” composed by the Chief Rabbinate incorporates the phrase “the beginning of the sprouting of our redemption.”

61. Interestingly, in the wake of the Persian Gulf War, the Lubavitcher Rebbe issued a statement speaking of “Miracles” and “signs and wonders,” noting that he had predicted that victory over Saddam Hussein would come on Purim, and suggesting that the messiah might not be far behind. This and other messianic allusions prompted Rabbi Eliezer Schach, the leader of the non-Hasidic ultra-Orthodox groups in Israel, to attack him for messianic pretensions and label the Rebbe as “a false prophet.”

62. Rav Abraham Kook, *Orot Ha-Kodesh* (Jerusalem: The Society for the Publication of Rav Kook's Books, 1938), II, 19-22, pp. 322ff.

Moses and the Horns of Power

BENJAMIN EDIDIN SCOLNIC

IN DR. ROBERT GORDIS' "ON METHODOLOGY in Biblical Exegesis," he calls attention

to two positive and constructive principles that are intimately related; the importance of semantic change and the ubiquity of psychological association as a basic component of the human mentality. Association is constantly at work enlarging and modifying the meaning of words, often beyond the dictates of formal logic or coherence . . . As psychoanalysis and the study of symbolism have made clear, the range of association is virtually limitless. It is so far-reaching that frequently we can only register the fact of semantic change, without being able to reconstruct the psychological process by which it was arrived at.¹

These principles may be applied to a difficult and ambiguous Biblical passage, Ex. 34:29-35, in which Moses descends from Mt. Sinai with the tablets in hand and a changed physical countenance. While Michelangelo seems to have portrayed Moses with horns, Jewish tradition and most of modern scholarship have rejected horns in favor of rays or beams of light. It will be suggested here that Gordis' principles of semantic change and psychological association can aid in the elucidation of the key phrase in the passage, *karan ohr panav* (lit., "the skin of his face was horned"). The method will be to examine this phrase closely, to study the noun *keren* in the Bible, to review the larger context of Ex. 32-34, to give a few of the traditional Jewish and critical interpretations, consider parallels from Egyptian literature and mythology, and then to present a reading of the passage that owes a great deal to the principles of semantic change and association.

Here is the passage according to the new Jewish Publication Society translation of Tanakh (NJV):²

So Moses came down from Mount Sinai. And as Moses came down from the mountain bearing the two tablets of the Pact, Moses was not aware that the skin of his face was radiant, since he had spoken with Him. Aaron and all the Israelites saw that the skin of Moses' face was radiant; and they shrank from coming near him. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the chieftains in the assembly returned to him, and Moses spoke to them. Afterward, all the Israelites came near, and

1. *The Word and the Book: Studies in Biblical Language and Literature* (New York, 1976), pp. 1-26.

2. We will follow the NJV throughout this study except where a more literal translation is necessary.

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he instructed them concerning all that the Lord had imparted to him on Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he would leave the veil off until he came out; and when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see how radiant the skin of Moses' face was. Moses would then put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with Him.

When the translation renders *karan ohr panav* as "the skin of his face was radiant," it obscures the difficulties involved. The Hebrew word *ohr*, with the Hebrew letter *ayin*, means skin, and is not the same word as *or*, with an *aleph*, which means light. Tradition and scholarship know the difference between the two words, but, to many exegetes through the centuries, *or* — "light" has seemed to make better contextual sense.

The major difficulty with the idea that Moses' face emanates rays of light is that *karan* literally means "horned." *Keren* is a common noun, which is found seventy-five times in Biblical literature. It literally means the horn of an animal, as it is used in Gen. 22:13, where a ram is caught by his horns in a thicket near the altar on which Abraham was to sacrifice his son Isaac. But there are actually very few other Biblical references in which *keren* simply means the horn of an animal. Exactly a third of the passages refer to the "horns of the altar," the prominent corners of the altars on which animals were sacrificed.

The horn of an animal was used to pour oil on a designated king, as we see in the cases of David (I Sam. 16:1,13) and Solomon (I Kings 1:39). This formal act used the horn as a symbol of power (the horn is the animal's weapon against its enemy) and enlarged the symbolic range of the word *keren*. For, once the horn was the vessel that transmitted power, when it was associated with the act of anointing, passages such as these were logical developments:

He will give power to His king
And will raise the horn of His anointed one (I Sam. 2:11)

There I will make a horn sprout for David
I have prepared a lamp for My anointed one. (Ps. 132:17)

These verses do not indicate that David's descendant will have a horn on his head, nor that he will be anointed with the oil from a horn. Rather, the horn has itself become a symbol of power, both the power inherent in an animal's horn and the power associated with God's anointing/selection of His chosen one.

The horn becomes a familiar symbol of power in Biblical literature. The horns of both Israel (Deut. 33:17, Ezek. 29:21, Ps. 89:18, Ps. 148:14, etc.) and its enemies (e.g., Lam. 2:17) are portrayed as either elevated (e.g., Ps. 75:5,6) or fallen (e.g., Job 16:15).

When Hannah offers thanksgiving for the birth of her son Samuel, she begins her prayer:

My heart rejoices in the Lord
 My horn is exalted in the Lord
 My mouth is enlarged over my enemies
 Because I rejoice in Your salvation. (I Sam. 2:1)

In Ps. 75, among the three usages of *keren* is:

Lift up not your horn on high
 Speak not with a stiff neck. (v.6)

The parallelism of a rejoicing heart or arrogant speech with a raised/exalted horn demonstrates *keren*'s flexibility and usefulness. Hannah's song is a shofar-blast of triumph; the foolish should not, in our American colloquialism, "toot their own horn."

There is only one passage in the entire Bible, other than Ex. 34, in which the root is used as a verb, and that is Ps. 69:32, where the *hiph'il* (causative) of the verb is found, to be translated "is horned:"

This will please the Lord better than an ox
 Or a bullock that is (caused to be) horned and hoofed.

The only case in the Bible where *keren* may be associated with the rays of light usually found in Ex. 34 is Habakkuk 3:4. In the preceding verse, we read:

God is coming from Teman
 The Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah.
 His majesty covers the skies
 His splendor fills the earth.

One is tempted to see the image of the sun, covering the sky from one end to the other. Then comes 3:4, a famous crux:

And there is a brightness as the light
 He has *karnayim* (lit. "horns") coming out of His hand
 And therein His glory is enveloped.

The usual translation is "rays" here, but W.F. Albright, in his famous article, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," rejects this notion:

There is no real basis for the usual rendering "rays" instead of "horns," which is deduced from this one passage and does not appear in any early version; the word *keren* in Ex. xxxiv. 29ff. may most naturally be interpreted as meaning simply "horny," whatever its vocalization.³

Albright relies on the absence of precedents in saying that there is no basis for translating *karnayim* as "rays" here. Context, however, does suggest something to do with the sun and light. Add 3:11 to what we have mentioned:

Sun (and) moon stand still in their habitation
 As Your arrows fly in brightness
 Your flashing spear in brilliance.

3. In *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*, ed. by H.H. Rowley (Edinburgh, 1950), p. 14.

Still, 3:4 remains full of difficulties; as one scholar puts it:

... Hab. 3:4 is a dangerous proof-text, since it is manifestly corrupt; *tihyeh* is the wrong gender, "brightness was like light" is tautological, "from his hand to him" is self-contradictory, and the meaning of *hebyon* is unknown.⁴

Nevertheless, corrupt or not, *someone* associated the sun's rays with the word "horns," on the assumption, we may presume, that it would make sense to the readers of the text. We will return to this problematic verse below.

To review that we have discussed so far: In reference to Dr. Gordis' two principles of semantic change and psychological association, we have indicated that the meaning of the word *keren* changed and expanded through a process of association. *Keren* has a range of meaning from "horn" to "power," but it does not usually seem to have any associations with "rays of light," except perhaps in the problematic Habakkuk 3:4. In Ex. 34, then, it would seem that *karan* does mean "horned," unless there is reason to apply Habbakuk's usage.

Ex. 34:29-35 In Context

In order to understand our passage, we must see it in the context of Ex. 32-34. Ex. 32 is the story of the Golden Calf. Moses ascends Mt. Sinai and seems to be delayed past his expected time of return. The people build a Golden Calf, and state: "These are your gods O Israel, who have brought you up from the land of Egypt" (v.4). Moses descends, breaks the tablets, and quashes the rebellion.

The end of Ex. 32 and all of Ex. 33 concern the issue of God's Presence in the camp in the aftermath of Israel's revolt. Moses attempts to gain secure knowledge that God's Presence, literally "face," will go with the people as they journey from Mt. Sinai to the land of Canaan. In 33:14, God gives Moses explicit assurance on this matter: "My face will go and I will lighten your burden." Moses goes further and asks to see God's *kavod*, His Presence. God responds that He will make His Presence pass before Moses, but the latter will not, for his own safety, be allowed to see God's face. Moses is instructed to hide in a cleft of the rock, where he will be shielded with God's hand as He passes by. Moses will see God's back but not His face.

It is not entirely clear where all of this is happening. God indicates to Moses that he hide in the cleft of the rock which is near Him: "See, there is a place near Me. Station yourself on the rock ..." (33:21). From this, we would deduce that the entire conversation (33:12-23) is taking place on the mountain. Yet, Moses has not ascended Mt. Sinai since Ch. 32. It is only in 34:4 that he goes up again to gain new tablets.

4. William H. Propp, "The Skin of Moses' Face — Transfigured or Disfigured?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 375-86.

It is in 34:5-7 that God passes before Moses as He had promised in 33:17-23. The terms of the covenant made in Ch. 34 are written down on the tablets.

After he experiences God's passing and receives the new tablets, Moses descends, unaware that his face has changed in the process. It is significant that 34:29 states: "Moses was not aware that *karan ohr panav*, since he had spoken with Him." But we know why the skin of Moses' face is *karan*, and we know when it became so — he had "seen" God pass by. But we are left to ask why it happens at this particular time, after so many other communications. The easy answer would seem to be that Moses saw God's back. But Moses had seen God before (Ex. 24:10-11, 33:11), and nothing had happened to his physical appearance.

We will turn to the Midrash and the commentators for guidance. *Exodus Rabbah* gives us three answers to the question of why Moses' face was changed at this point:

Moses knew not that the skin of his face sent forth beams. Whence did Moses derive these beams of glory? The Sages said: From the cleft of the rock, as it says, And it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover thee with My hand until I have passed by. R. Berekhiah, the priest, said in the name of R. Samuel: "The tablets were six handbreadths in length and six in breadth; Moses grasped two handbreadths and the Shekhinah another two, two handbreadths being left in the centre, and it was from them that Moses derived those beams of splendour." R. Judah b. Nahman said in the name of R. Simeon b. Lakish: "A little ink was left on the pen with which Moses wrote (the Decalogue) and when he passed this pen through the hair of his head the beams of splendour appeared; hence does it say: Moses knew not that the skin of his face sent forth beams."⁵

The answer of the Sages, also found in *Tanhuma*, is that Moses saw God's back and/or hand and, therefore, found his appearance to be changed. If seeing God's face meant certain death, seeing a part of God would not leave a man untouched. But our question, based on the previous encounters in Ex. 24 and 33, remains a stumbling block. R. Berekhiah's answer attempts to connect the actual physical receiving of the tablets to the change in Moses' countenance. The notion may be better suited for the reception of the first tablets, and *Ex. Rabbah* has a similar passage concerning Ex. 19:3 (*Ex. Rabbah* XXVIII:1) in R. Berekhiah's name. Here, where Moses carves the stone tablets and writes on them (as opposed to Ex. 31:18, where the tablets are inscribed with the finger of God), the answer seems out of place. Still, 34:1 does indicate that God will Himself write on the tablets. R. Judah b. Nahman's fanciful interpretation connects Moses' writing with his changed appearance.

It is important to emphasize that all three Midrashic responses seek the answer to the riddle of Moses' face in the context.

5. *Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus, trans. by S.M. Lehrman (London, 1961), pp. 541-2.

Rashi prefers the Sages' answer, and then goes further, stating that "the light radiates and projects like a horn." Thus, we are not speaking of actual horns on Moses' head, but horn-shaped rays of light emanating from his face.

Ramban states that Israel "saw the beams of glory streaming from his face," and suggests that the people may have stepped backwards because "they thought the Glory of God was there, or that the angels of Him on high were with him."

These traditional interpretations all seem to assume that light emanates from Moses' face. But our examination of the term *keren* makes us doubt this assumption. If *or* means skin, and *karan* means horned, then the best literal translation would seem to be "the skin of his face was horned," although — in any case — not from his head, as Michelangelo portrays them, but — in some fashion — from his face.

William H. Propp⁶ has done the finest survey of interpretations, ancient and modern, of the meaning of *karan* or *panav*, from the various versions/translations to modern critical thinking. The majority view is clearly that *karan* describes radiance, and a minority view is that Moses grew horns or wore a mask with horns. The ritual mask theory has little scholarly credibility today, and few are willing to talk about the idea of Moses growing horns on his head. To state the obvious: It runs against our modern sensibilities to think of a super-physical phenomenon such as a man with horns, emanating from the skin of his face, and it runs against our Jewish (read: anti-anti-Semitic) sensibilities to think of our greatest leader with horns on his head — which, as I have indicated, is not supported even by a literal translation of *karan*.

Propp has an intriguing idea of his own — that we must concentrate on the word *ohr* — "skin." The text does not say that Moses' head was horned, but that his skin was *karan*; Propp thinks that *karan* may mean "keratosis, a toughening of the layer of skin called keratin (Greek *keras*, "horn") that can be caused by drastic overexposure to sunlight" or another skin condition, possibly "the formation of little bumps comparable to budding horns." Moses was not "transfigured," Propp says, but "disfigured."

We find Propp's theory plausible. It fits with our modern and Jewish sensibilities. But to reduce the phenomenon that frightens the Israelites to a mere skin condition caused by overexposure to sunlight is, we would insist, to miss the point of the passage. (In a modern film, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, the recipients of a new revelation on a new Mt. Sinai hide in the cleft of the rock but are overexposed to great light and heat. The skin of their faces becomes toughened and orange, but the condition is barely noticed by others.)

Propp's meticulous scholarly treatment is problematic in two ways;

6. See note 4.

it reduces the supernatural splendor of the passage to a skin ailment, and reduces the range of meaning to one literal interpretation. It is our purpose to open the text to a greater range of meaning, a range which — in the context — has not, to my knowledge, been fully considered, but which is similar to the approach and goal of rabbinic exegesis.

The Horns of Egypt

We will now attempt to present background for a connection between “horns” and light. In the literature of ancient Egypt, we can find many texts which display this connection, texts such as this one (in which the king climbs to the sky on a ladder):

Hail, four-horned Bull of Re
Your horn in the west
Your horn in the east
Your southern horn
Your northern horn
Bend your western horn for Unas,
Let Unas pass!⁷

The sun-god Re is depicted, as is extremely often the case, as a bull with horns. (There are four horns here instead of the usual two because the text is speaking of the four cardinal points to which the sun emanates light.)⁸

Henri Frankfort presents an interesting text in which King Teti “attempts to establish his relationship with the heavenly family by calling himself a calf — and a golden one, at that — thus sharing the sun’s substance:”

Pepi comes to thee, O father of his
Pepi comes to thee, O Re!
A calf of gold, born of heaven
The soft one of gold, formed by the Hesat-cow.⁹

Frankfort discusses the merging of solar and cattle images in Egyptian mythology. The sun was the symbol of the established, permanent order which was reborn in the sky every morning. The cow was the symbol of procreation, and the calf was the living symbol of this power in cattle. So, in a religion obsessed with life after death, the rebirth symbolized by a golden calf, a sun-calf, was very powerful indeed.

7. Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Vol. I (Berkeley, 1975), p. 39.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

9. *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago, 1978), p. 170. The passage dates from about 2200 B.C.E.; although this seems early, the famous parallel to Moses in the bulrushes, that of Sargon of Akkad, is c.2300 B.C.E. We could also note the following from the “Hymn of Haremhab,” who was Pharaoh right before Ramses I, and who lived around 1350 B.C.E. (most scholars date the Exodus in the 1200s): “Thou art beautiful and young as Aten (the sun disk) in the arms of thy mother, Hathor.” Hathor is depicted as a cow or, when depicted in human shape, with horns and the sun disk on her head.

One could bring any number of examples from Egyptian art, mythology and religion which depict the gods with horns and/or solar disks. The bull and the sun are one, which means that the bull with horns is the sun. Re is the “young bull with sharp horns, the unknown one who hideth himself from that which cometh forth from him; he is the flame which sendeth forth rays of light with mighty splendour.”¹⁰ The sun-god is he “whose skin is hidden, whose form is secret, . . . lord of the two horns [who was born of] *Nut*.”¹¹ *Nut* is the sky, the cow; Re is the sun, the calf.

The gods are “the shining ones.” The eternal part of a man was the *Khu*, which may be translated as “shining one,” “glorious,” or “spirit.” In *The Book of the Dead* we read: “Behold, thou image of gold, who possesses the splendors of the disk of heaven.”¹² One hopes to become “one of those shining ones who live in rays of light.”¹³ Once one has changed, he can say, “the gods beheld me, and I have beheld the gods.”¹⁴

We cannot resist mentioning the many pictures from ancient Egypt that depict gods whose hands emit rays of light like those from the sun. One is reminded of the seemingly strange notion in Hab. 3:4 that “rays are coming out of his Hand.” Rather than change “from his hand” to “from his side,” as some translations have rendered, we may be better served with exploring the mythological background of the psalm.

We are not concerned here with tracing the development of mythological images in an historical grid. Our hope is to suggest that there may be an Egyptian background to Exodus 32-34.

We disagree with the scholarly tendency¹⁵ to see the golden calf as a pedestal on which God stands/rides. The scholars really want the word “calf” to be “bull,” because “calf” does not seem to make sense; gods always rode on bulls. The calf is the idol of a god, as the text says explicitly in Exodus 32:1, 4, and 8. Perhaps the calf is an Egyptian symbol of the sun-god. Then again, what would one expect from a people that has just concluded centuries of living in Egypt?

We are attempting to explore the language and symbols of the story. We should think about layers of meaning, not just historical layers such as sources, but the layers in a word like *karan*. The Sumerian sign, SI, can mean either “horn” or “radiance.” Arabic *karnun* means horn, but also describes “the first visible part of the rising sun.” We wonder whether there are not natural associations that can be made which are basic to the creation of languages.

10. E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, Vol. II (N.Y., 1969), pp. 14-15.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

12. *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, trans. E.A. Wallis Budge (N.Y., 1967), p. 328.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 333-334.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 335.

15. *Exploring Exodus* (New York, 1986), pp. 218-19.

Association is the technique we have used in simply letting solar and cattle images hover before the reader, because, with Gordis, we believe that this is how images and words are created, not in a mathematical, systematic way but through a process of relatively free association.

We can now suggest why, and in what way, Moses becomes "horned" at this particular point. The people had worshipped a golden calf. God says (in effect) "You want to see a horned symbol of the sun? Take a look at Moses. You wanted to replace Moses and Me with the Golden Calf? Moses is my representative, he reflects My light. Behold My agent on earth. Here, in terms you can't miss, is the message of My power."

Ex. 34:29-35 is difficult because of one obscure phrase. But the phrase is not only difficult because we do not know what *karan* means; it is difficult because we resist the notion that *karan* has anything to do with horns. We must learn to read without presuppositions: "Horned" may mean "horned" after all, but it probably means "horn-like radiance," because of the association, in Egyptian culture, between animal horns, and the power and radiance of Egyptian solar and animal gods.

Once we see the story in its context, and add some images from the culture that the people have lived in for centuries, we begin to wonder if Moses is not "horned" as a Divine response to the idolatry of the Golden Calf incident. The Golden Calf is the sun-god, the child of the sky-goddess who was a cow. The Golden Calf had horns. Now Moses is horned as well, horned with a radiance that mocks the physical horns of animal idolatry.

The preceding paragraphs represent an outline of a theory that we have developed in these pages. But it is not our wish to place this theory in confrontation with that of Propp or any of the other exegetes and scholars. For we believe that the phrase *karan* or *panav* is a splendid example of the complexity of language. We revert to Gordis' statement: "Association is constantly at work enlarging and modifying the meaning of words, often beyond the dictates of formal logic or coherence." *Karan* does not just mean "horned;" it is also associated with the selection of God's human representative and, most of all, with power. If the intention was to indicate rays of light, there were more direct, less obscure ways to say it. To utilize the word *karan*, with its various layers of meaning, was to incorporate many of its nuances, and they are all very much to the point of the story, for Moses' face becomes the symbol of the power of God.

We deliberately included Egyptian material above that pointed in different directions. Moses "possesses the splendors of the disk of heaven," he is "one of those shining ones who live in rays of light."

We must also focus on the word *panav*. After the Golden Calf,

God tells Moses that His Presence will pass before “his face.” Moses cannot see God’s face and survive. The key word is “face”: Can one see God’s face? It is Moses’ face that is affected.

Moses’ horns, or his shining face, or his shining horns, are a rebuke to the people’s sin and a confirmation of Moses’ special role. Moses’ wearing of his veil may not make sense to us, but it is a response to what has happened to him. Moses does not realize, at first, that his appearance has changed, though he probably would have if light were emanating from him. (Perhaps it is the permanence of the change of which he is initially unaware.) Moses puts on the veil, but not when he is speaking to God or when he is speaking to the people. Why does he put it on at all?

We may compare the veil to the *parokhet* in the Mishkan. The *parokhet*, which is a veil, separates the holiest part of the Tent of Meeting from the other part. It is introduced in Ex. 26:31ff.

And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet . . . and you shall hang up the veil under the clasps, that you may bring in there, within the veil, the ark of the Testimony; and the veil shall be for you as a division between the holy place and the most holy.

Moses can enter the Tent and talk with God, but the *parokhet* will shield the ark from his view. Moses will be alone when he communicates with God, but even he must stay on this side of the *parokhet* (Ex. 25:22; 30:6, 36; Num 7:89, 17:19).

There may be a parallel between the *parokhet* and Moses’ *masveh*-veil. A veil separates parts of the Tabernacle, the Holy of Holies where God is, from the other holy part. Similarly, Moses’ veil separates parts of his life, as God’s agent, covenant-mediator, from his other duties. Moses learns the idea of a veil from God, who does not want to be seen, even by Moses. There are times of theophanies and central revelations when God allows Himself to be seen. But at all other times, the *parokhet*-veil blocks all from seeing Him. Moses puts on the veil and says, in effect: “There are times when I am receiving and transmitting Divine revelations, and then I will be seen. At all other times, the *masveh*-veil will block my being seen.”

The idea that Moses can have horns or light-beams or a horn-like radiance is not just a result of our conflicting presuppositions and theologies. The text itself sends forth different messages, the text emits “beams” in all directions. And then, just when we feel we are getting close, we are staring at the *parokhet*-veil and realize that we can only see so much.

The reader of these pages may still ask: “But what does *karan* mean?” Our response is that the associations involved in the use of the word, its complexity, its range of meaning, prevent us from offering a single interpretation. We prefer to leave the reader with several thoughts. We are content to say that “undecidability” is not a failure,

but a recognition of the symbolic range of language. As a prominent scholar of rabbinics has written recently:

Exegesis from one generation to the next has inexorably evolved in one direction — that of diminishing textual yield. As time marched on, the text *per se* seems to have yielded less and less.¹⁶

We would prefer to see increased textual yield.

An *a priori* rejection of “horn-like” radiance or of the relevance of Egyptian mythology diminishes the possibilities for interpretation.

What we have attempted to do here is to translate one difficult phrase, but translation is only the first step in the process of interpretation. The implications of Moses’ “shining horns,” the possibilities for further commentary, are interesting. Was Rambam right in saying Moses had ceased to be human? Was Julian Morgenstern correct when he wrote, half a century ago, about the vestiges of sun-worship in Israelite religion? Is there a lesson here about the effects of Divine revelation and knowledge?

Robert Gordis has never been reluctant to see new interpretations and nuances; in fact, he has often found his work to be contrary to the scholarly consensus. The meanings of words, he says, are constantly changing. The meaning of God’s word is always growing and that is its power.

In order to allow the Bible to speak to us, we must not place the veil of our arbitrary exegetical criteria on the face of the text. We must allow the Biblical word to be seen, and we must not shrink back, even if there are horns or frightening rays of light that makes us uncomfortable. For the horns of the words, the difficult ambiguous horns, are horns of power.

16. David Weiss Halivni, *Peshat and Derash* (N.Y., 1991), p. 22.

Problems and Solutions in the Book of Jonah

FRANK ZIMMERMANN

THE BOOK OF JONAH HAS BEEN A BATTLE-ground among scholars for centuries. It bristles with literary difficulties and weird improbabilities. For the most part, investigators have traditionally been satisfied, as with so many other Biblical books, to uncover the correct interpretation of the texts, as well as to deal with certain theological problems, as in Jonah's sojourn in the inside of the fish. In the nineteenth century, however, there was a change in Biblical perspective. In the main, J. Wellhausen and his school considered that to understand the history of Israel it is necessary to appraise and date documents to inform a proper progress in Israel's development. Thus, this school postulated two or three Isaiahs, Maccabean Psalms, two Zechariahs and that Proverbs and Kohelet could not have been written by Solomon. The *sine quo non* was that the Hebrew language has a history which cannot be gainsaid.

The modern investigator has at his command more resources than did his predecessors. New languages akin to Hebrew, such as Ugaritic, the enriched vocabularies of Akkadian that have been widely expanded, with Aramaic and a score of new adjunct and associated dialects, Arabic and contiguous dialects, to mention minimally the linguistic side, add much to the philological procedure. There are new advances in historical perspectives, in literary criticism, borrowings from the sciences, like Carbon 14 for dating, much help from discoveries in archaeology, more accurate dating of pottery, insights from psychology, data from economic research — all adding to the progress of Biblical research.

With regard to the book of Jonah, tradition ascribes the authorship to a Jonah ben Amittai (2 Kings 14.25), who was contemporary with King Jeroboam II of Northern Israel (circa 735 BCE), and who predicted the king's victory over the Aramaeans. In the opinion of most scholars at large, this traditional position is untenable. There are too many Aramaic words in the book, a sign of lateness; the expression "King of Nineveh" (Jon. 4:6) as a title is askew altogether, as absurd as it would be to talk of "The King of London." It is without analogy in history, moreover, that a Hebrew prophet should come to a heathen court and denounce the king and his nobles, and that the whole population should wear sackcloth and ashes and repent. The present paper

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seeks to answer some questions that have not been raised before, and to furnish some perceptions to age-old problems, as well as to understand some improbabilities within the book.

As one starts reading, one is stopped by some questions at the very first lines. God sends Jonah on the mission to proclaim the iniquities of Nineveh, but, instead, Jonah takes flight, goes down to Joppa, and takes passage on a ship. The question naturally arises, why did Jonah take flight? If he was frightened, of what was he afraid? He certainly would have known from tradition that a man could resist being a prophet if he did not want to. Consider the dialogue with God in Exodus 3, where Moses had offered all kinds of objections to justify why he could not, or would not, carry out God's behest to redeem the Israelites — namely, that he was a person of no importance, that the Hebrews would not heed him, that he could not speak well, that he stammered, and, finally, in exasperation, that God should send somebody else (Ex. 4:13). This was certainly a tradition that Jonah was aware of. Isaiah did not want to prophesy; — he was a man “of unclean lips” (Is. 6:5,7). Jeremiah objected that he was too young (Jer. 1:6). Jonah, therefore, could have manfully stood his ground not to accept God's commission, — or, at least, argued the point rather than attempting to flee. Then, again, there is something awry in his fleeing via the ship. In some forty-seven times that *barah*, “flee,” is mentioned in the Bible, it is always on land (by camel or donkey). It may not be of great moment to the reader at first, but it figures as a piece in the puzzle that we are trying to solve.

The ship sets sail. God sends a roaring tempest to batter it. The sailors, desperate, try to row to shore, but in vain. Terrified, all the mariners entreat their gods for help, but Jonah does a strange thing. He goes to the hold of the ship and falls asleep. The captain of the vessel comes to him and rouses him rebukingly, “How is it that you are sleeping? Up and pray!” The first question that will occur to one is this: why is it that Jonah goes to sleep, and, though less noticeably, Jonah is asked to pray to his God, but he doesn't. Apparently in answer to the question, the text tells us that Jonah tells the sailors that it is because of him that the hurricane rages, so that prayer to his God will be unavailing, and that they should throw him overboard, which they proceed to do. Even if Jonah knows that the storm is intended for him, this is strange behavior. Why does he ask to be thrown into the sea? Here is a Jew, some four hundred years before Christianity, who is willing to give up his life to save *pagan* mariners from death.

The sea settles to a calm and God prepares a great fish to swallow Jonah. He remains in the innards of the fish for three days, during which time he composes a psalm of deliverance. After the three days, the fish disgorges Jonah up on the dry land. This is the most arresting action that catches the attention of the reader. Why does the fish swallow

Jonah? In the literature of the world we meet with other similar parallels. A man is shipwrecked. He flounders in the water. By dint of swimming and holding onto a raft, he reaches land (Robinson Crusoe; Ferdinand in the *Tempest*). In a way, this is the experience of Jonah. He, too, has to struggle in the water and to reach dry land. But the fish intrudes. Jonah has to be first swallowed and then disgorged up on the dry land. Something is going on, and it seems important. What is it? Why does the fish swallow Jonah?

The fish supplies the key to the other elements in the story. The fish is really a symbol. Of what? The fish is a womb symbol, a womb structure, a womb fantasy. The source of this idea is found directly in the book.

First, when God orders the fish to swallow Jonah, the fish is designated in Hebrew as *dag gadol*, "a big fish" (Jon. 2:1), masculine gender. In the next verse, the fish is described as *dagah*, feminine gender. This means that the author was, at the very least, uncertain about the fish, with the femaleness of the fish unconsciously projecting through. Second, the text says that Jonah was in the womb of the fish (*bi'mei ha'dag*), from the Hebrew (v. 2). *me'ayim*. For example, when God speaks to Rebecca, he says "... two nations will be separate from your womb, *me'ayikh*." See further Is. 49:1 Ruth 1:11.

This conception that the fish is a symbol for the womb, and certainly well known as an erotic symbol, is familiar to students of comparative anthropology. The Greek Anaximander compared the womb to a shark.¹ According to the Waspishiona and Taruma Indians, the first woman had a carnivorous fish inside her vagina.² The mermaid in popular imagination is a woman, i.e., the upper part of her is woman but the bottom part of her, that is to say, her genital, takes the form of a fish.

What now is the significance of Jonah being in the womb? The answer is that when Jonah is being ejected from the fish on to the dry land, he is going through a birth process. He is being born *again*. He is becoming a new man. Through his rescue he has a new confidence in life. He has experienced the nearness and the reality of God. He feels that he has been touched by God's presence.

This idea that man can be reborn is later continued in Jewish tradition. A proselyte, converted to Judaism, is regarded as a small child, and all his sins are forgiven.³ In Christianity, too, this thought is par-

1. Cf. O. Rank, *Art and the Artist* (Engl. trans.), p. 133.

2. M. Leach and J. Fried, eds., *Standard Dictionary of Folklore* (N.Y. 1950), Vol. II, p. 1152.

3. *Ger shenitgayyer ke-yeled katan dameh... mōhalin lo kol avonotav*. B. Yevamot 22a, 48b; Bekhorot 47a; Bikkurim III, 3. Jonah's stay in the fish for three days was his purification, and thereby his sin was forgiven. What this sin was, I have dealt with elsewhere, advancing the hypothesis that, in his youth, Jonah was a participant in Syro-Hellenistic orgiastic

alleled where Jesus tells Nicodemus that unless one is born again in the spirit and water (baptism) one cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5).

The supposition that the womb symbol is found in the book is confirmed elsewhere. When Jonah goes down into the ship, that, too, is a womb symbol. This may be shown by the fact that in ancient times people naturally associated in their unconscious mind "womb" with "ship." Thus, for example, the word *navis* in Latin means "womb" and "ship." In Greek, *gaster* means "hull of a ship" and "womb." *Gaster* in the Latin means both "womb" and "ship."⁴ The two symbols of fish and ship, however, have different functions. When Jonah went into the ship (the return to the womb) he wanted to plunge into oblivion, to escape life.⁵ He was tired of life. He wanted to escape the overhanging death threat by an avenging, punishing God for the burden of guilt that he was ridden with. In the fish, however, he wanted to live. When Jonah was in the ship, he could not pray. In the fish, he gave thanks and composed a psalm. Again, in the ship, he had thought of God as relentless, exacting a full penalty, unforgiving. From the experience of the fish and his own deliverance, he knew God as compassionate and forgiving. Jonah became transformed, free of guilt and cleansed of sin. In the second section of the book, there is, however, another Jonah who must now be considered.

II

The second part of the book (chs. 3-4) describes God's commission again⁶ to send Jonah to denounce the king of Nineveh, the royal court and the population, and that in forty days the city would be overturned and demolished. At the prophet's charge, everyone puts on sackcloth

practices whereby he sinned in two of the three of the greatest crimes considered in Judaism: worshipping idols and immoral sexual activity. See my book, *Biblical Books Translated from the Aramaic* (New York: KTAV, 1975), p. 63.

4. Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*; Liddel and Scott, *Greek Dictionary*, s.v. Hebrew does not have these counterparts. In Arabic, however, *batnun*, "womb," undoubtedly has an association with *mubtanah*, "sailing vessel" (in the dialect of Syria) [*Hava, Arabic Dictionary*, s.v.].

5. Interesting in this connection is that, in Hebrew, *kever* means "grave" and "womb." See Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli, the Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. This association came about because of the abortions, still births, and miscarriages as well as the ineffective sperm that left a couple barren, and led to the apprehensive belief that the womb had killing properties.

6. The word *shenit*, "again," was wrongly placed by the compiler at this point. The word really belongs in Jon. 1:1 which, as set forth in this essay, is the second charge to Jonah. The reference in Jonah 4:2 to Jonah's fleeing to Tarshish, which seems to conflict with this thesis, should be disregarded at this juncture because it is likely an interpolation that was casually inserted at some point in the development of the various stories about Jonah, as I note in Jonah II below.

and ashes, and likewise even the animals. Jonah retires outside the city to watch it be blasted and destroyed. He builds a booth to have protection against the scorching sun. Nothing happens! No destruction! God sees that the people have repented and spares the city. Jonah is mortified. He was considered to be a prophet and now his reputation is ruined. He prophesied Nineveh's annihilation, and now he will be scorned as a false prophet. In effect, God says to him, "Why are you so upset? You have been successful as a prophet! You prophesied against the Ninevites and they *listened*. How can I destroy them if they repented?" God flowers an immense plant to shield Jonah from the blazing heat. Jonah rejoices. Yes, God is taking care of his prophet. But the plant withers and dies. Jonah overdramatizes himself again and asks to die; he is denied, of no account, dishonored. Should not God have spared the plant to keep his prophet in cool comfort? God says to him again, "Why are you upset? You were concerned for a plant that lived for the day; should I not be concerned about human beings and animals?"

A number of scholars have questioned the unity and coherence of this second episode.⁷ For example, in 4:5 it is Jonah who builds a booth against the burning sun. In the next verse it is God who sprouts the large plant to shield Jonah. The intermingling of the names of *Yahweh* and *Elohim* in the fourth chapter is also a source of perplexity.⁸ Scholars, however, have generally rejected these assumptions as not convincing enough.

The coherence of this episode with the first part of the book can be affirmed, however, on literary and psychological grounds. There can be no question that, in the long oral tradition about Jonah, certain displacements took place. When we compare the two halves of the book, we realize that there are two different personalities, two different Jonahs. Actually, when the compiler composed two traditions about Jonah, he mistakenly put one before the other. This need not surprise us. As critics aver, the majority of the Biblical books have been pieced together, and some not in their proper places — as, for example, in Jeremiah, the Greek and the Hebrew versions have a different order of chapters.

The ending of ch. 4 is segmented, abrupt, cut off, as agreed on by all hands. Actually, the second half of the book has a younger Jonah; the first half is an older Jonah.

In the second section, chs. 2-4, when the younger Jonah is ordered by God to prophesy, he is ready and eager to go (Jon. 3:2,3) After all, a prophet is not without honor. It is a joy to be the instrument

7. W. Boehme, "Die Composition des Buches Jona," ZATW (1887), 224-84; H. Schmidt, *Jona* (1907); H. Winckler, *Altorientalische Forschungen II* (1900), pp. 260-65.

8. Cf. J. Bewer, *Jonah*, in the *International Critical Commentary* (ICC) series, pp. 13-21 for further details.

of God; he hurries to Nineveh, and, without preliminary warning that its inhabitants should repent from their evil ways, as he would be expected to do (see e.g., Ezek 3:19; 33:3), he announces that in forty days Nineveh is to be overthrown (3:4). He goes outside the city to watch its destruction. He is like a child who wants to see the fireworks, without regard for the sparks or fire that might ensue, or what loss of life or limb might be incurred. But the city is spared and Jonah is humiliated. Thinking that he was in the same situation as the great prophet Elijah, Jonah uses the same language as Elijah in 1 Kings 19:4 as he says, "Take away my life. Better I die than live," all this because he felt that his role as a prophet would be held up to scorn — on account of Nineveh being saved, contrary to his prophecy. When the plant withers and fails to protect him from the sun, he again asks for death. Clearly, he is immature, and much concerned about his honor and his precious self. He is acting out a role.

Jonah I is different. He is mature, sensitive to the sufferings of others. If he is the same Jonah as Jonah II, then there are twenty five years between them. He does not want to be "the rod of God's anger." This is the reason why he wants to escape God's command to annihilate Nineveh. He is not indifferent to the inhabitants of Nineveh even though they are pagan, just as he is concerned for the safety of the pagans on the ship, as noted above. In his own thinking, he is guilt-ridden and suicidal. He seeks a ship that will carry him away to the end of the world; indeed, he wills to be lost at sea. If the ship is endangered because of himself, as he recognizes, he will give his despaired life for others. He really thinks that he should have died for his sin(s), but God has saved him, through the Divine instrument of the fish. He knows then that God has forgiven him. Newly born, he becomes spiritually renewed.

The amalgam of the two traditions by the compiler was mismanaged and misconceived. The young Jonah, immature, self-centered, thinking only of his "great" role as a prophet in Israel, should have preceded Jonah I. The older man, shrinking with dread at the awful responsibility of the portentous prophetic role as the evil messenger, should have been placed, *hysteron proteron*, second. This arrangement now begins to make sense. The book would not end now in a cut-off fashion, but is a good prelude for the first but displaced section. The ostensible ending of the first part where the fish disgorges Jonah on the dry ground ends with the pungency of the short story with the full impact on the reader of Jonah's redemption — and there is nothing else to add. The reader comes to his own conclusion: God will change his mind if human beings will change theirs.

A matter of some moment is the aim of the compiler of these diverse traditions. Doubtless, there were many traditions that circulated around the person of Jonah, just as there were around other figures in the

Hebrew Bible, Adam and Eve, Enoch, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Baruch, and others preserved as apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, to say nothing about the hundreds of legends that have accumulated in Jewish folklore. Apparently, the compiler selected two strands in the Jonah saga for a special design that he had in mind. First, it is possible that a whole nation can be forgiven even though this nation (Nineveh-Assyria) had, according to accepted Biblical narrative, driven Northern Israel into exile. While the Assyrians have sinned monstrously, repentance is their salvation. Second, it is possible for individual pagans (Jon 1:5), if they renounce their idol worship, to be converted to be Jews (1:14, 16). These distinctive ideas provide the clue for putting Jonah into a historical frame for dating the book.

From the Exodus to the destruction of the First Commonwealth (1300 BCE (?)–586 BCE), the Hebrews thought themselves in a special relation with Yahweh, their God. They regarded themselves as his children (Deut. 14.1). The land that the Hebrews possessed came under His special jurisdiction. If one were compelled to sojourn outside the land, it was considered a dire calamity (1 Sam. 26: 19; Ps. 42:7). To be in another land, one became contaminated and became unclean as the land became polluted by idols (Amos 7:17). Because Yahweh was an ethnic god, he was limited to Canaan and the Hebrew tribes solely. This is the point of Moses' chant in the Song of Triumph in Ex. 15:11: "Who is like unto thee Yahweh, among the gods . . .", meaning that, though there were other gods, Yahweh was supreme. Moses had pressed home that only Yahweh was to be worshipped (monolatry, not monotheism). Concomitantly, one was a Hebrew because he was a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Yahweh, their God, brought their descendants out of Egypt. Hence, there were no converts. Uriah, the Hittite, for example, husband of Bathsheba, dropped his Hittite name and tried to identify himself with the Hebrew people by adopting a Hebrew name — "Yah is my light" — but he is Uriah, the Hittite, all the same. (See further 2 Sam. 11:3, 11:21).

In the Hellenistic period, with the advent of Alexander the Great (d. 323 BCE), a profound change took place. Yahweh was no longer an ethnic god. The canonization of the Pentateuch in 444 BCE gave rise to two fundamental parties in Israel, the strict constructionists, i.e., the Sadducees, and the liberal constructionists, i.e., the Pharisees. The latter gradually gained the ascendancy in influence in every day life, and — as Josephus tells us — they won the support of the people. It was the Pharisees who vigorously advanced the idea that Yahweh was not the god of Israel alone but the God of all mankind. Gradually, the name of Yahweh was changed to Adonai, as, for example, when the reader of the Torah came to the name of Yahweh he would pronounce it Adonai. Many Gentiles disavowed belief in idols and their orgiastic worship, and professed belief in the God of all mankind, and

were encouraged by the rabbis to do so.⁹ The Pharisees embarked on a widespread activity to make converts throughout the world. As the Gospel of Matthew records about the Pharisees "... ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte ..." (Matt. 23:15). On the authority of Josephus we learn that most of the pagan women in Damascus were devotees of Jewish religious practices (*Bell. Jud.* II.20, 2). Proselytes were given high positions in the communities and were considered honorably on a par with the members of the Jewish people.¹⁰

There were many factors that contributed to the widespread conversion of the *gerim*. Alexander the Great had extended citizenship to the Jews in all the major cities, confirmed also by the *Diadochoi*, his successors in Egypt and Syria. Then the growth in population among Jews made their influence far reaching and effective. Philo reported that in Alexandria there were over a million Jews, while Josephus reported that the most numbers were in Syria.¹¹ Undoubtedly, too, the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, begun under Ptolemy II Philadelphus, became an important spur and a moral power (Acts 8.28). A factor, too, in the wide conversions that took place was the collapse of the old religions in the Hellenistic period, and the spread of the mystic Oriental religions of all varieties, mingled with superstition and magic. Populations were aimless and adrift. There was, in Gilbert Murray's phrase, "a failure of nerve."¹²

There was ready soil for the diffusion of religious belief and practice. Great numbers of the *yir'ei Adonai*, "God Adherents", lit. God fearers, mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, Psalm 115:11,13; 118:4; 135:20, the *sebomenoi ton theou* of Josephus and the Acts,¹³ were an important segment in Jewish life.

There can be no question that the *gerim*, if not universally so, were accepted into the Jewish communities with understanding and goodwill. This is evidenced by the fact that the book of Ruth, antecedent

9. "Anyone who disavows (*ha-kofer*) heathen religious practice is called a Jew"-B. *Meg.* 13a. "Anyone who disavows heathren practice it is as if he acknowledges the entire Torah"-B. *Kidd.* 40a.

10. Comp. for example, L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 6, p. 269, n. 112. Note especially the statement *habibin ha-gerim, shebekhol makom ha-katub makish otam ke-yisrael, Bamidbar Rabbah* 8: "Proselytes are cherished for Scripture always puts them on a par with Israelites." See further, "Diaspora", in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, Extra Volume, 91 ff. Earlier passages are given by Ginzberg, *loc. cit.*

11. Comp. E. Schürer, *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes*, III, (Leipzig, 1909), pp. 164-175.

12. G. Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, 1933, ch. 4. Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule*, p. 205, contends that no significant number of pagans accepted Judaism, because of *milah* (circumcision) and *tevilah* (immersion) and "the full rigors of the law") but Zeitlin seems to take a different view. See S. Zeitlin, *The Rise and Fall of the Judean State*. 3, p. 324 f.

13. Comp. Schürer *Op. cit.*, p. 174f. In general, these were pagans who more or less accepted the doctrines of Judaism and who would attend the synagogue but who did not formally seek admission to be Jews.

to Jonah, reflects the favor extended to Ruth, member of the hated Moabites, wherein she, as widow, was considered to be qualified to marry Boaz who was her levir. She was most joyously received into the community (4:14). The author cleverly slipped in the very last verse that this *geiora* was the ancestress of King David(!). The relations between the proselytes and the members of the community were open and forthright. Of course, the community resisted any dilution of its laws, codes, structure, integrity, and identity, but withal, it always remained hospitable to the *gerim*.

In its own way, the book of Jonah made its plea for a rapprochement to proselytes. It will be recalled how Jonah revealed himself to the mariners ("I am a Hebrew and the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land I do worship") and asks to be thrown into the sea; they are astonished at his self-sacrifice. They pray now to God; they offer sacrifices; they pledge with vows. The Rabbis rightly interpret that they became converts after Jonah is thrown overboard and the sea is becalmed. And so, too, it is implied by the author, that the mariners, pagan though they be, are nevertheless under the care of the God of all mankind, and, as the narrative continues, they too are God's creatures, are Jews, through their acknowledgement and conversion. Accordingly, Jonah seeks to save them through his life. Mention has already been made that one of the great doctrines of the book is that God will forgive a nation if it will repent of its ways, the message of *teshubah* "repentance."

Scholars have speculated much on the origin of these ideas in Jonah. Driver¹⁴ maintains that the author's purpose is to carry out the teachings of Jeremiah, especially in 18:7f. They are two important verses but not encompassing enough. Others, as F.C. Porter,¹⁵ offer Ps. 65-67, and Is. 40ff as sources for the idea of a universal God. All these have a bearing in a way on Jonah, but I am inclined to think that Is. ch. 66 may be the real source, where the prophet declares that there is no point to building a Temple, "for the heavens are my throne and the earth is my footstool; where will you build a house for me and where will my resting place be? I will gather peoples from every tongue and they will see my glory. From every nation your 'kinsmen' will come as an offering to the Lord. Yea, from them I will choose priests and Levites. A new heaven and a new world I am creating and all mankind will come to worship at My holy mountain" (condensed). This could very well be the source for Jonah's perceptions.

In the light of the presentation above, it is not difficult to posit, a dating for Jonah. Ben Sira (ca. 200 BCE) already knew of the Twelve Minor Prophets as one book. Hence, it was already canonized. It was

14. Samuel Rolles Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, (Charles Scribner's Sons N.Y.: rev. ed. 1913, rept. 1942), "Jonah," p. 321f.

15. *Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v., "Proselytes."

also written in the afterglow of Alexander's conquests, with his granting of citizens' rights to the Jews. Thus, it would be safe to say it was written about 250 BCE, and served as a beacon light of reconciliation and forgiveness in that century.

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